

# Teachers' Reaction to a Ninth Grade Campus: Implications for the Transition to High School

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Boston College

Lynch Graduate School of Education

Educational Administration

**TEACHERS' REACTIONS TO A NINTH GRADE CAMPUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE  
TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL**

Dissertation

**by**

**PIPIER SMITH-MUMFORD**

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

### Teachers' Reaction to a Ninth Grade Campus: Implications for the Transition to High School

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Dr. Irwin Blumer, Dissertation Director

The transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is a critical time in a young person's educational career. Ninth grade programs and separate buildings for ninth graders have grown over the last ten years in an effort to meet their distinct needs. Research in this area reveals very little documentation of the teachers' voices on this subject. This researcher sought to add their perspective in identifying the salient features of effective ninth grade programs which make for a smooth transition to high school. More specifically, the researcher wanted to learn if teachers of only ninth graders believed that a separate facility eased the transition to high school.

An observational case study and qualitative methodology was used in this study. Ten faculty members were interviewed about their work at a ninth grade campus that existed for two years while the main high school was under renovation.

The results of this study revealed the following:

- Isolating ninth graders in a separate building, wing or floor eases the transition to high school.
- Ninth grade students benefit by building relationships with peers in the same grade.
- Fewer concerns about bullying by older students with freshman only facilities.
- Parent involvement is high with a separate facility for ninth graders.
- Positive adult relationships with ninth graders are essential for their success.
- School size makes a difference in how well school personnel meet the needs of ninth graders and in how safe students feel.
- Staff development which allows teachers time to discuss students,

curriculum and instruction, helps ninth graders as well as teachers.

- Student activities play a pivotal role in ninth graders' feeling connected to their school, and offers opportunities to build positive relationships with older students.

These findings were consistent with the literature on the transition to high school. The ninth grade teachers' perspectives validated their experiences and the research. Administrators should pay close attention to the planning for this transition in order to maximize high school success for ninth graders.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

The importance of transitions in schooling is evident on many levels. If one were only to look at the sheer volume of literature and research available on the topic of transitions, that alone would be overwhelming and telling. For educators working with students in the age group of preadolescence through adolescence, the literature suggests that the significance of any transition from one grade to the next, and most especially from the middle school grades to high school, is critical to a student's overall success (Queen, 1999; Lounsbury & Clark, 1990; Gatta & McGabe, 1997; Carnegie Corp., 1989; Popper, 1967). Yet this particular transition, from middle grades to high school, has only recently been given more specific attention.

The issues of equity and diversity and the need for students to embrace lifelong learning make it imperative that students complete high school, and are capable of analyzing information, synthesizing it for contextual application, while also communicating and collaborating effectively with others. These are the essential skills for high school students and adults for life in the twenty-first century. Classroom teachers are critical change agents within school reform efforts. However, there is very little research studying teachers' perspectives on the elements which constitute successful grade transitions. In addition, the current research about this transitional phase most often examines hard data, such as student performance on standardized tests, drop out rates, size of the school, demographics of students and the community,

and focuses less on developmental issues and social emotional needs of this age group (Queen, 2002). Carnegie Corporation's Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents was entitled *Turning Points* (1989) and documents adolescence needs and development as it impacts their education. The eighth grade is seen as a pivotal year, second only to the first year of high school. (Lounsbury and Clark, 1990).

Understanding the issues and the needs of eighth and ninth graders is vital to create the appropriate and effective programs which meet their needs and provides the necessary support to the other students.

The research on programs designed to address the transition from middle to high school indicates that in many cases, the programs were created because an opportunity presented itself. A new principal, new guidance director, a new building, an increase or decrease in student population or some other external school phenomena often triggers the need to address new and old challenges and perhaps offer enhanced or improved procedures for long-standing issues (Murray, 2003).

In work done by Larson (1980) teenagers face the following developmental tasks: 1.) develop their own values and not just parrot their parents' ideas; 2.) find out what they can do and be proud of their accomplishments; 3.) form close relationships with peers; and be accepted, loved, and respected for who they are and what they believe. It is the search for identity that most drives their actions at this developmental stage. (Oxley, et al. 2000). The essential challenge for educators working with this age group is to answer this question: How does one build a school program that allows students to search for their identity and be successful academically and socially?

This dissertation will offer the perspective of teachers working at a ninth grade campus, while their main high school building underwent construction. The premise of this study is that teachers and students build close working relationships

when housed in a smaller school setting designated for ninth graders which provides for a positive impact on the transition year. A positive transition year then sets the stage for a more successful high school experience.

The critical elements of successful transitional programs are examined as part of the literature review. Identifying those factors which make for a successful transition to high school from the teachers' point of view adds to the study of this topic and implies a need for professional development opportunities which help teachers of this age group. Transition's most basic notion is that one moves from point A to point B. For human development, two such points are childhood to adulthood and the transitional time between them is called adolescence. Wattenberg (1974) defined childhood as the need for adults, both financially and socially, within the culture. He defines adolescence as a time when a young person's reproductive system has matured, they are economically dependent upon adults, their primary source of gratification comes from their peers, their sexuality is awakening and the society's roles and status for adults and children in the culture is confusing to them (p. 141). Given this, schools must be mindful of the characteristics and needs of this age group and fashion programs to meet them accordingly.

In the 1960's, concerns about providing the proper support to early adolescents, led to the creation of middle schools, replacing the junior high school models of grades 7-9 with middle schools for grades 6-8. According to the U. S. Department of Education, middle schools have grown from over 3000 to more than 10,000 in the last thirty years. This has meant that ninth grade students have had to make the transition to high school at a time when they are still young, immature, easily overwhelmed by the size of large schools and vulnerable with peers and older students. The struggle many of them face has everything to do with the fragile stage of their physiological and psychological development ( Dusek, 1987; Hill, 1980; Lipsitz, 1984).

### Statement of the Problem

The philosophy of the middle school movement was to accommodate the changes of early adolescence by establishing common curriculum themes and teams of teachers to address students' academic and social needs. The transition from elementary school to middle school grades was seen as a step closer to the preparation needed for high school, thus the term junior high school. The history of the middle school movement included the concept of establishing an atmosphere of learning in which students would feel comfortable, thereby increasing the odds that they would remain in school. The concept was to prepare students for the rigors of high school while also maintaining the closeness of an elementary school (Popper, 1967). These same goals are relevant today and make the case for increased efforts to ease the transition for adolescents into high school from grade eight.

High school presents a high stakes dilemma with increasingly intense academics coupled with peer pressure in larger settings, not often seen as welcoming by ninth graders. With more and more communities focusing on college and higher learning, failure in high school (as determined by failing grades, high absenteeism, drop out rates, high pregnancy rates, drug use and other high risk behavior) is even more significant and damaging to the individual and to society. Extensive research has been devoted to why students dropout of high school.

There is a dire need for more information on effective transition programs in high school, including an organized effort to involve ninth grade teachers. Teachers of ninth graders offer a unique perspective in their work with this age group. They have information that can inform and improve educational practices as they relate to this transition. Their input will help meet the needs of these students, increasing the

likelihood of developing effective transitional programs. A successful transition from eighth to ninth is the building block for success in high school.

Increasing the odds for student success in high school has everything to do with the sense of connection that students feel with their school (Eckstrom, et al., 1986). Teachers play a critical role in helping make that connection happen. This study examines the existing school programs designed to minimize the culture shock students experience in moving from middle school grades to high school. The primary focus is on the perspective of one set of ninth grade teachers who have taught for two years at a ninth grade campus in an urban/suburban public school setting. The goal of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base about the transition to high school created from teachers' point of view.

In a national study conducted by Queen (1999), the research examined the responses of more than 5,000 ninth graders, after nine weeks in the ninth grade. Only 29% reported liking their school, 24% reported liking their teachers, and 27% liked the way teachers were teaching. This study highlighted the need for effective transitional programs.

The ninth grade year, because of a variety of factors, puts ninth graders "at risk" more than any other high school grade (Eckstrom, et al., 1986). The primary variables attributed to this are directly related to the nature of change and transition, particularly from small school settings to large school settings. The results are most often characterized by poor academic performance, increased absences, increased behavior problems and decreased activity in extra curricular activities. (Smith, 1997; Reinhard, 1997; Fritzer and Herbst, 1996; Bureau of Census, 1997). Much of the literature points to the extensive efforts many high schools and middle schools exert to develop programs addressing this transition. Yet, few studies reflect an analysis of the problem from the perspective of the classroom teacher. Teachers' points of view on



how best to meet the needs of ninth graders would substantially enhance or caution those who would create transition programs for the entry to high school. With limited literature documenting the teachers' professional opinions and expertise on the matter, schools often end up recreating the wheel or worst, embarking upon ill-fated programs. A thorough examination of this ninth grade campus and interviews with a random sample of the ninth grade campus teachers in this study provides at least one resource in which the teacher's voice is made public.

This study focuses on the teachers' perspectives as to the variables which positively and negatively impact the ninth grade students' transition to high school when they are located in a separate facility. Their responses add to the existing data which primarily excludes teachers' voices. The experience of these teachers will help determine whether the separate facility for ninth graders is a key element in the transition to high school. The study also examines other eighth grade to ninth grade transition programs across the United States. Common characteristics of successful programs are compared with those characteristics identified by the teachers in this study.

One part of the study offers an in depth look at the concept of a separate facility for ninth grade. The results of this study also adds to the knowledge base about the advantages and disadvantages of such a program, as well as its benefits and drawbacks as identified by teachers housed in the separate building from the other high school teachers. It examines in a real life setting the implementation of a ninth grade program that the research supports as widely accepted but little tested. (Queen, 2002) It also more closely examines the components which address the needs of this age group. Additionally, this study seeks to highlight those programs which promote healthy and productive outcomes for ninth grade high school students.

### Research Questions

With the greatest impact from grade transition occurring from eighth to ninth grade, this study seeks to include the ninth grade teachers' perspective in identifying the key elements for a successful transition. J. Allen Queen's twelve factors for successful transitions are widely discussed in much of the literature and are mostly drawn from statistical data about drop-out rates, grades, student demographics, interviews with students and studies on large, urban high schools. The central objective of this study is to determine the initial reactions of a ninth grade staff to the concept of a separate ninth grade campus as a method to ease the transition to high school. Therefore the essential research question is this: From the ninth grade teachers' point of view, does a separate facility for ninth graders provide for a smooth transition from eighth to ninth grade?

This study seeks to specifically highlight teachers' professional opinions of the impact of the relationships that they are able to build when working solely with ninth graders. The secondary research question is this: Does a separate setting with ninth graders contribute to the creation of closer student/teacher relationships which then contributes to a smooth transition to high school?

A final objective of this study is to determine the salient features of successful eighth to ninth grade transitional programs. An examination of transitional programs from across the country will help address this objective.

### Theoretical Rationale

Research indicates that the ninth grade should be treated differently from the other high school grades. Factors which have been proven successful for ninth grade transition include: Teams of teachers, guidance counselors and administrators exclusively for ninth grade, core curriculum with an interdisciplinary approach, older

student mentors, participation in extra curricular activities, and the creation of separate facilities, wings, or floors (McGanney, 1990; Thompson, 1991; Cheng and Ziegler, 1986; Gifford and Dean, 1990 and Sizer, 1988).

Another important variable to a smooth transition from middle level grade to high school is the quality of student/teacher contact in the ninth grade. Teachers who volunteer to be on transition teams, elect to teach ninth graders and work as a ninth grade team with other teachers, counselors and administrators, increase the likelihood that the transition for students will be a smoother, more successful one (Gatta, 1997). Student advocacy programs, primarily in the middle grades, are identified as a viable option in involving teachers in the lives of their students beyond the classroom.

Gatta and McCabe (1997) describe a study of advocacy programs as a means of expanding the role and effectiveness of ninth grade teachers. Results indicate that establishing a significant relationship with a member of the school faculty where the students' social, emotional and academic needs are met, enables the ninth grader to receive the appropriate nurturing and support needed at this critical transitional time. The most salient feature of the advocacy programs studied was the willingness of teachers to work with freshmen. They were connected to the students and cared about the "whole person". Clearly, the quality of the student/teacher contact has an impact on students' comfort level, thereby effecting their attendance, academic achievement and overall behavior in school.

J, Allen Queen's (2002) book, Student Transitions from Middle to High School offers one of the most comprehensive studies of this topic. He begins with an identification of twelve factors contributing to successful transitions between middle and high school. They are as follows:

- 1.) The larger the high school, the greater the negative impact of transition on ninth grade students.

- 2.) Ninth grade students' adjustments to high school are complicated by their perceptions of a bigger school, different environment, changed class schedule and smaller classes.
- 3.) Fear of getting lost in the high school building is by far the number one fear of ninth grade students.
- 4.) Ninth grade students view high school teachers less helpful than middle school teachers.
- 5.) Ninth grade students must have at least one adult in their lives for genuine support in order to become academically and socially successful.
- 6.) The lower the students' grades drop during ninth grade transition the higher the students' probability of dropping out of school.
- 7.) Students who failed during the transition and drop out of school, experience life long difficulties, physically, socially, emotionally and economically.
- 8.) Students, once in school, who experience two or more transitions prior to ninth grade, have a greater probability of quitting high school.
- 9.) High school drop out rates are higher for middle school students than for students attending K-8 schools.
- 10.) Ninth grade students who have negative experiences during the transition period have poor attendance, low grades and fewer friends. They tend to become behavior problems and have greater vulnerability to negative peer influence.
- 11.) Drop out rates increase for poorly transitioned, especially minority students, in schools using high stakes testing.
- 12.) Social and economic factors negatively impact graduation rates, especially in large urban areas. (Queens, 2002, p. xii-xiii)

These factors further support the premise that a smaller school setting for ninth graders builds closer relationship between teachers and students thus making for a more successful transition. The first five of the twelve factors are most relevant for this study as they specifically focused on school size and student/teacher relationships. These

twelve factors strengthen the argument that this transition is a critical one.

Other research has identified additional factors which impact successful transitions. According to Alspaugh (1998), other contributing factors have been determined: student participation in extra curricular activities, family background, personal problems and school related problems. Relationships between teachers and students, and smaller school size are also factors which contribute to staying in school and better attendance to school. These last two factors are of particular interest for this study since they are examined in more depth and detail.

The teachers' interviewed for this study were asked to identify the most salient features of the ninth grade campus which contributes to a successful transition to high school. The theoretical rationale supports the notion that these teachers are in an ideal position, as teachers of only ninth graders in a totally separate facility, to offer their professional opinions about the impact of student/teacher relationships and school size and the successful transition from middle school grades to high school.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is evident for several different reasons. One of the most important is to contribute additional research which may help to promote effective programs related to the transition to high school for ninth graders. Ultimately, it may lead to the support of programs which help to decrease the high school drop out rate. The implications of this study could also suggest different organizational plans for ninth graders even if ninth grade is part of the nine to twelve high school building. This study also offers the opportunity to hear from teachers who provide a real life perspective of experiences in the day to day trenches of the classroom. In particular, it gives voice to those teachers of ninth graders who may recognize and understand, from firsthand experience, the trials and tribulations of this

population. Since there has been very little research on this topic that has been primarily generated from the teacher's point of view, this study will offer additional perspectives on the transition to high school.

Students' academic performance on standardized tests continues to drive many of the decisions local school districts make to implement reforms and plan staff development. However, standardized test scores must be coupled with additional indicators for student success. Encouraging teachers as adult learners (Grimmet & Neufeld, 1994) and considering teachers' personal growth and intellectual needs (Schon, 1983), while seldom in practice, are also indicators of student success. Often teachers feel they are the last to be asked about innovative educational policies or programs. The "top-down" approach by many school systems leave many teachers feeling excluded in decisions which impact the classroom directly. (Lieberman, Saxe & Miles, 1988).

The examination of transitional programs designed to address the complex needs of ninth graders will provide a context for identifying the key elements of successful programs. This study provides a review of the most effective strategies in the some of the most effective settings. It also hopes to broaden the perspective of educators working with ninth graders, so as they embark on designing programs they do so with some of the latest research now encompassing a sampling of teachers' point of views.

In this study, key variables of ninth grade teachers' behaviors, such as close observation of student behavior and student interactions, and timely staff responses to student needs, further highlight the collaborative relationships that were built. These relationships are not only between teachers but just as importantly, between teachers and students. This allowed for a shared responsibility for reaching the whole person. (Oxley, 2000). An examination of the efforts of these teachers as they work as teams to

meet the needs of this age group adds to the knowledge base of how best to support students through this transition from eighth to ninth grade.

### Research Design

The premise of this study is that teachers and students build close working relationships when housed in a smaller school setting designated for ninth graders. The main purpose is to determine the perspectives of a sample of ninth grade teachers who worked at a separate ninth grade campus, and gather qualitative data (through individual interviews) to determine if they see this setting as a method to ease the transition to high school. The qualitative research method used for this study is an observational case study. As researcher and principal of this separate ninth grade facility, data was collected as a participant/observer. This detailed examination of the ninth grade facility and the interviews of teachers provided the data to determine the primary elements of this eighth to ninth grade transition experience.

A group of teachers from a ninth grade campus near Boston were interviewed. The sample of participants was taken from the eighty-four professional staff members, across the disciplines, both full and part time. They had at least one or two years' experience at the campus, and have had at least three prior years of experience working with ninth graders. With this criteria, sixty were eligible to participate. A representative sample of fifteen staff members was selected for interviews by the process described below. Ten were available and agreed to be interviewed. One was interviewed at the conclusion of the two year project as a pilot study and three others were interviewed a year later. The remaining six were interviewed four years later.

Interview questions were open-ended and allowed for individual identification of the salient features of the campus which the teachers saw as key factors in promoting student success, and/or negatively impacting student success, both in academic and

social areas. Each interviewee was asked to share evidence that would specifically illustrate each of these salient features.

### Participant Selection Process

Three primary criteria ranges were determined for participant selection in this study. The first criteria range is the number of years in the profession. Since this ninth grade campus was a two year project, participants must have had at least three years prior experience working with ninth graders in a nine through twelve high school setting. This would allow for a comparison to be made in their working with ninth graders in that setting versus the ninth grade campus. Preference was given, whenever possible, to those who had five years or more experience prior to working at the ninth grade campus. Non-professional status (less than three years teaching experience) educators were not eligible to participate because they had had less than three years experience as educators. Sixty staff were eligible to participate because of their years of experience.

The second criteria range in determining selection was the amount of time spent working at this two year ninth grade campus. There were four tiers of preference, full time for the two years, part time for the two years, full time for one year, and part time for one year. Of the sixty eligible, thirty-four work part time at the campus. Of the thirty-four part timers, twelve spent one year at the campus. They were in the lowest preference tier in the selection process. Twenty-two part timers spent two years at the campus and they were placed in the second lowest preference tier. The next tier of preference was given to those who were full time for one year. Four were eligible in this category. Those who were full time and had worked at the ninth grade campus for the full two years were given the highest priority and placed in the first tier of preference. Nineteen were eligible in this top tier. Ten were available and agreed to



be interviewed. Six were interviewed at the conclusion of the two years and four were interviewed four years later. The third criteria range was the representation by departments. There were fourteen department categories from which the participants could have been selected. The list below indicates how many staff were eligible to be participants in the study by department once satisfying the first two criteria.

1. Social Studies-1
2. English- 4
3. Math-2
4. Science-2
5. Special Education-1
6. Foreign Language-2
7. ESL-2
8. Performing Arts-1
9. Career/Technology-2
10. Visual Arts-1
11. Physical Education/Health-1
12. Guidance-2
13. Support staff-3
14. Administration-2

There were a total of twenty-six eligible participants. Of these twenty-six, ten were available and agreed to be interviewed. Six interviews were completed immediately after the project and four were conducted four years later.

A case study analysis was also conducted which entailed gathering data on the creation of the campus with special attention given to teacher interviews. This urban/suburban school district which lies just outside of Boston is composed of a diverse community of racially, religiously, ethnically, economically, and linguistically mixed populations. Many of these parents are professionals, here temporarily, to study at local universities and hospitals while others are from families who have lived in the area for generations.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted with teachers who volunteered to take part in the creation of this temporary ninth grade campus and as such, may already enter the study with a bias that skews the results in favor of this method as the best way to transition ninth graders. Although, the study is of one community and has a small sample of teachers, the results may be generalized to other similar communities. Also important to note is the effect of a limited time frame for the existence of the ninth grade campus. The knowledge that the campus was a two year project could present special considerations since all teachers knew at the conclusion of the project that they would have options of continuing to teach ninth graders exclusively or to teach a mix of grades. This understanding could make the teachers' reporting of the experience more positive than it may have actually been than if they had to teach ninth graders indefinitely.

Another limitation of the study may be that the researcher also served as the principal of the separate ninth grade campus. As a result, teachers in the study may have responded more positively to interview questions based on what they believed would please the researcher. Efforts were made by the researcher to minimize comments during interviews. However, the personal and professional style, values and philosophies of the principal/researcher are not unknown and could have indirectly influenced the responses of those interviewed.

### Definitions of Key Terms

*Transition*- movement from one educational experience (grade) to another.

*Freshman*- ninth graders entering high school

*Ninth grade campus*- separate facility away from the other high school students (10th-12th grades)

*Middle grades*- sixth, seventh and eighth graders in a kindergarten through eighth grade

elementary school setting

### Overview of the Study

This dissertation has five chapters. The First Chapter begins with the background of the study, describes the problem, the theoretical rationale and the professional significance, and then presents an overview of the methodology used in the study. The First Chapter concludes by noting the delimitations of the study and defining some specific terms. The Second Chapter provides an overview of the relevant bodies of literature which have influenced the direction and design of the study. The Third Chapter will present the overall research design, indicating the various methodologies employed in gathering relevant data, reviewing the rationale for using those methodologies, and sampling techniques. It will also discuss the methods of data analysis and provide a reporting of the data collection process. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. The final chapter, Chapter Five, summarizes and discusses the findings in light of the theoretical rationale and the relevant literature, and, finally, makes recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter is organized into three parts. The first section examines the issues of transitions in general and the impact of transitions in schools. Specific attention is paid to the research which looks at the importance of the transition from middle school grades to high school, including the needs of adolescents. In the second section, high school structures and the impact of school size on student/teacher relationships is reviewed. Teachers' perspectives on high school structures and the impact on relationships is also reviewed. The final section looks at the literature on transition programs and the elements of effective middle to high school transitional programs.

Each section of this literature review is based upon an in-depth and systematic search conducted through ERIC, MetaQuest, and the internet websites of school districts with separate ninth grade facilities. The following review provides information about the importance of school transitions.

#### **I. Transitions**

The World Book Online Reference Center (American English), offers the following definition of 'transitions': the plural of transition- "a change or passing from one condition, place, thing, activity, or topic to another..." Throughout life, one is presented with a series of transitions. From birth to death, the human race moves through transitions as part of growing, changing, and becoming who we will be. However, this simple definition of transition fails to encompass the full

psychological and social emotional aspects of the experience. Researchers, Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe (1967) describe transitions or life changes as stress producers, even for those changes that move from a worse situation to a better one. They attempted to rank order the effects of various life changes according to the amount of stress each produced. A change in family circumstances (divorce, death of a parent, family illness, loss of job or decrease in financial state) moving, changing schools, and the beginning and ending of school year, ranked high as life events that cause stress.

Since transition's most basic notion is that one moves from point A to point B, the difficulty of achieving a smooth movement or transition must take into account the individual's psychological, and social/emotional condition, effecting their preparedness for this change. For human development, a time of transition is between childhood and adulthood. This transitional time is called adolescence.

### Elements of School Transitions

School transitions are smoothest when a number of factors are in place. Foremost among these are the adults' understandings of the needs of children during their different developmental stages. The transition from one grade to the next, particularly if it means from one school to another, appears to involve three basic elements influencing that transition: a solid knowledge base by educators and parents of the developmental tasks a normally developing child experiences, a positive relationship between teacher and student, along with a partnership among school staff and throughout the school district, as well as between the home and school, and a curriculum and classroom setting that reflects the needs of the age

group. (Queen, 2002; Mizell, 1996; Hertzog & Morgan, 1996; Mac Iver, 1990; Paulson, 1994). These three basic elements impact the students' experience in a complex manner, affecting each other and in turn influencing the school transition period.

The Developmental Issues. Several psychologists and researchers have studied child development and their work points to the various tasks or behaviors that identify the physiological and psychological changes that occur and impact personality development. These developmental stages and associated behaviors help frame the challenge for schools.( Keating, 1988; Peterson, 1983). Piaget (1958) examined early childhood development. He specifically studied children in their school settings to contribute to the field of child and educational psychology. His findings led to the creation of early childhood centers, preschools and kindergarten programs based on Piagetan schools of thought, focusing on the egocentric nature of this age group.

Erickson (1963) believed that social relationships were the most important aspects in personality development. His eight stages of psycho social development represent a life span of development characterized by a specific challenge or crisis. In particular, the adolescence stage is described as "identity vs. identity confusion" for those thirteen to eighteen years of age. He sees the primary tasks of adolescence as the search for identity and the search for a meaningful role in society. Feelings of confusion can arise over the decisions made during these developmental stages.

Maslow (1970) believed strongly that human behavior is motivated by a desire to achieve self-actualization or to reach full potential. To accomplish this, individuals must take risks. Maslow posits that adolescent behavior is characterized by choices which may lead to the realization of their potential.

Rogers (1977) placed great emphasis on the human ability to derive a view of oneself as an individual as part of the process of human development. This self-concept needs to be congruent or consistent with one's life experience in order to make healthy adjustments to life changes. During adolescence, this self-concept is still developing and is fraught with conflict as the adolescent tries to reconcile their sense of self and their experiences with family, friends and other adults.

The challenge for schools is to create classrooms which reflect these changing needs. Wattenburg (1974) defined childhood as the need for adults, both financially and socially, within the culture. He defines adolescence as, "a time when a young person's reproductive system has matured, they are economically dependent upon adults, their primary source of gratification comes from their peers, their sexuality is awakening and society's roles and status for adults and children in the culture is confusing to them" (Wattenburg, 1974, p. 141). Given this, schools must be mindful of the needs of this age group and respond by fashioning programs to meet these needs accordingly.

The extensive literature on the parents' role in school places a major focus on the importance of parent education in child development. Educators hope that long before students arrive at the school door, parents have, ideally, had the benefit of professional assistance in the care of their child from the earliest stage of pregnancy on. (Epstein, 1986). Parents become less and less involved in their child's education as they go through elementary school. As students enter middle school grades, parents are all but absent as students push for their independence and school organizations become more complex for parents to maneuver (Hollifield, 1995). Multiple teachers and subjects, different time structures and larger facilities also contribute to an increasing distance between home and school. Paulsen (1994) reported that parent support is vital to school transition, particularly as students enter adolescence. Epstein (1991) further

posits that parent involvement is critical in student readiness for school and for support as they move through the school organizations. Educators have studied the parents role in student success at every age and conclude that when parents play an active role students experience more school success (Comer, 1980).

**The Relationships.** In establishing schools which meet the range of student needs, Sergiovanni (1994) writes that building a sense of community requires that all stake holders be invested. Common values and articulated goals are hallmarks of schools that work together. Peterson (1992) further describes learning communities as educational environments where competition is downplayed and cooperative learning techniques and peer collaborations are the norm. There is more opportunity to take part in school governance allowing students to take a more proactive role in their learning. This promotes a culture of students and teachers speaking about caring for one another.

Student/teacher relationships are important to the transition process, as are teacher/teacher relationships and home/school partnerships (Alspaugh, 1998). The basis for these relationships is a common sense of purpose, shared values and a level of trust.

Eckstrom's (1986) study of high school drop outs indicates that increasing the odds for student success in high school has everything to do with the sense of connection that students feel with their school. Teachers play a critical role in helping to make that connection happen. Eccles, et. al (1984) looked at students who transition from grade to grade and school to school within the same district have to make more than one middle and high school transition. They posit that for those students whose parents and school personnel meet and communicate



regularly experience fewer disruptions to the process of learning during the transitional period. These transitions have the support of teachers and parents. The Carnegie Council's national research (1989) supports the premise that opportunities for students and teachers to build trusting relationships are key elements to the development of these relationships, particularly with adolescents. This council reported that the adolescent needs support from the adults at school and at home to improve the chances for high school success and decrease the drop out rates.

Weldy (1991) identified teacher and parent support as significant factors in students' transition to the high school.

School staff identify smaller classes as a significant feature for improved student/teacher relationships. Researchers also support this claim. Ornstein (1990) posits that largeness in schools is a negative factor. Even if an optimal number cannot be determined, largeness is considered socially and psychologically detrimental. Maintaining a class size that promotes close student/teacher working relationships is a worthy goal not only for the benefit of school transition but also for ease of support to students who need additional academic support. Research, in general, concludes that smaller class size increases student achievement and assists in the building of positive interactions between students and teachers.

Gatta & McCabe ( 1997) found that a smooth transition from eighth grade to high school is very much related to the quality of student/teacher contact in eighth and ninth grade. High school teachers who volunteer to be on transition teams, elect to teach ninth graders and work as a ninth grade team with other high school teachers, eighth grade teachers, high school counselors and administrators increase the likelihood that the transition for students will be a smoother, more successful one.

Student advocacy programs, primarily in the middle grades, are identified as a viable option in involving teachers in the lives of their students beyond the classroom. Gatta and McCabe describe a study of student advocacy programs as a means of expanding the role and effectiveness of ninth grade teachers. Results indicate that establishing a significant relationship with a member of the school faculty where the students' social, emotional and academic needs are met, ensures that the ninth grader receives the appropriate nurturance and support needed at this critical transitional time. The most salient feature of the advocacy programs studied was the willingness of teachers to work with freshmen. They were connected to the students and cared about the "whole person" (McGabe & Gatta, 1997, p. 273). However, "these advisory programs were found to be largely a middle school concept" (McGabe & Gatta, 1997, p. 275). This largely middle school concept still has relevance in helping ninth graders make the transition from eighth to ninth. The familiarity of routines and structures like the advocacy program, promotes positive student/teacher relationships.

Mac Iver (1990), like Epstein (1991), sees opportunities to build teacher to teacher relationships characterized in their research as models for teaming: grade level or cluster teams with common planning times with specialists, such as special education teachers, reading and math specialists, music, art and physical education teachers as well as other support staff, such as guidance counselors, social workers, and administrators. The degree to which the school professionals work as a team to meet the needs of the student population mirrors the degree to which the transition period negatively impacts student learning. Therefore, the more time school staff spend planning for the transition as a team, according to Mac Iver and Epstein, the more likely the impact on student learning is a positive one. Chivers (1995) also looked at teacher teaming and its impact on school climate. He found that teachers working in teams at the middle

school prepares students for high school and engages middle school students more in their studies. Teachers who are known to their students over the course of their sixth, seventh and eighth grade years, meet with more success in the middle school grades according to Mizelle (1995).

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) found that schools with extensive coordination of inner district collaboration increased the odds for students academic success. Their work support the research by MacIver (1990), which found that successful middle level transition programs were those programs that used a number of different transition activities, most notably, teacher-teacher and teacher-administrator collaboration.

Morgan (1999), a co-chair of the Center for Transition Studies at Augusta State University, list the professional development of teachers in regard to adolescent development at the school level as promoting team work with teachers while also providing students with additional adult contact. In Chivers (1995) study of middle schools which worked with teams of teachers, found teachers reporting a more satisfying work environment and more successful students. Moss (2000) added to this premise with his work. He also reported that teachers working in interdisciplinary teams served student needs more effectively than those working in more traditional teaching models.

The home/school partnership is touted throughout the literature as a critical feature of student achievement and school success. Making schools inviting places where parents can become active partners in their children's education is a long-standing value espoused in this country. Comer's work (1975) has long held the premise that parent education and involvement is critical to the child's growth and development in schools. The Comer Project has been an ongoing model of parent outreach for schools since its inception in New Haven, Connecticut in the early

eighties. Sizer (1988) contributes to this idea as his Essential Schools' philosophy embraces parent participation in the life of the school community as a vital element in student success. Sergiovanni (1994) further supports the establishment of active parent involvement in the creation of a successful school community. With parent participation in the life of the school and thereby in their child's life, promoting student achievement is an unmistakably desired feature of schooling.

Liner & Silverberg (1997) posit, however, if the parents' role is critical in student success, then the challenge for schools is to provide additional adult support to students during this fragile stage of development. This is particularly true for parents whose adolescents who are pushing parents away as part of their developmental task in seeking independence. Horn & West (1992) add that schools are also charged with keeping the communication lines open so that all the adults working together for the best interest of the student have all relevant information about the student. This minimizes gaps through which the fragile student might fall.

Weldy's work (1995) reveals that agreement exists among educators on the importance of this active home/school partnership to student success. Less extensive literature exists on the specific nature of parent involvement as it pertains to school transitions. Paulson (1994) believes more attention is being paid to parents' role in the transition to high school. Mac Iver's work (1990) further supports the positive impact of parent involvement in the transition to high school. Parents involved in the transition process tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences. This involvement leads to better school performance. Thus, the parent partnership with the school should be treated as a critical factor in school transitions. Hertzog & Morgan (1998) studied transitional programs in which parent involvement was encouraged. They report that those students with active parents have more positive feelings about school and feel better prepared for high school.

**Curriculum and Setting.** Age appropriate curriculum development is an essential component of teacher education programs. Report after report details the importance of innovative and varied teaching strategies and curriculum as a focus for teaching students in the middle school grades. Queen (1999) describes curriculum units that vary in content but have a similar thread in that they all actively engage students in their learning meet with more student success. Weldy (1995) discusses cooperative learning groups through pairings and small group work as the type of student centered activities which work better with adolescents. They are seen as instructional strategies most effective in teaching these students.

Queen (2002) determined that appropriate instructional times, block schedules and team teaching also aligns more with the needs of the adolescent and increase the likelihood for student success in the transition to high school. Hertzog & Morgan (1998) support the idea that school administration look at schedule structures for ninth graders in particular. Lindsay (1997) documents the work at secondary schools which promotes collaboration or team teaching.

In the 1960s, concerns about providing the proper support to early adolescents led to the creation of middle schools, replacing the junior high school models of grades 7-9 with middle schools for grades 6-8. In the report from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989), educators working with students in the age group of preadolescence through adolescence, find that the significance of any transition from one grade to the next, and most especially from the middle school grades to high school, is critical to a student's overall success. Lounsbury & Clark (1990) contend that the middle school model may have addressed issues of teaching strategies and student engagement but presented another dilemma in its creation of an additional transition for these students. Middle school programs that support a successful transition

to high school offer a challenging and supportive middle school experience (Belcher & Hatley, 1994). To illustrate this point, Mizelle (1995) conducted a study which looked at students (the Delta group) who stayed together with the same teachers through sixth, seventh and eighth grade, experienced more hands-on, real life learning activities and integrated instruction and cooperative learning groups (the Delta Project). She found that they were more successful in their transition to high school than were students (non-Delta group) from the same school who had more traditional middle school experiences. In their first year of high school, the Delta students were earning higher grades and were more likely to enroll in higher level math courses than the non-Delta students. Mizelle further reports that the Delta students stated that their involvement in the Delta Project helped them make the transition to high school more easily because they were more confident as learners and were able to forge better peer relationships. This is the crux of the research on the middle to high school transition.

In a study conducted by Alspaugh (1998), achievement loss in the transition from elementary to middle school does occur but that achievement based upon standardized test scores tends to recover after the transition year. The sample population for their study consisted of three groups from 16 different school districts for a total of 48 districts. One group was comprised of one elementary and one high school. The second group had one elementary, one middle school and one high school. The final group had two or three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The first group of K-8 schools experienced gains in standardized test scores while the other two groups which moved to middle schools experienced achievement loss. All three experienced significant achievement loss based upon standardized test scores when they moved to high school. Yet, the loss in achievement was less so in the second group as compared to the third

group which had multiple elementary schools moving into middle school and then to the high school. The first group, in the K-8 configuration, had less achievement loss than either group two or three. Their findings support the notion that the least number of transitions for students the better. The first group with a K-8 elementary and one high school still faced transition issues but more social/emotional rather than academic. The study does not address social issues that can arise from the transition to high school. Although, the researchers concluded that students placed in relatively small cohort groups, like K-8 school settings, for long periods of time, (9 years) tend to experience more desirable educational outcomes.

Other research indicates that ninth graders be treated differently from the other high schoolers. Hertzog & Morgan (1998) urges that teams of teachers, guidance counselors and administrators work exclusively with ninth graders. Lindsay (1997) discussed the importance of establishing core curriculum with an interdisciplinary approach. Weldy (1995) and Hewins (1995) focuses on reaching out to parents through a variety of activities. Providing older student mentors and having students participate in extra curricular activities are seen as significant according to Pohl (1995). After conducting an internet search which covered the last ten years of research in this area, the creation of separate facilities, wings, or floors within large schools, are a growing phenomena in U.S. secondary schools. These settings, often called a ninth grade academy, all promote the aforementioned characteristics as aspects of successful transition program (Queen, 2002).

School Size. Harp (1994) studied school size as a factor in school effectiveness. The sense of ownership that students experience in small schools contributes to student success. In schools too large, a sense of anonymity prevails. Students who are less connected to their school, experience anger and frustration and may commit acts of violence. (Sommers, 1997).

Smaller school settings have a better sense of their students and are therefore better able to meet their needs. Barker and Gump (1964) see this as the single most important benefit to smaller school settings. Students who feel connected to their school exhibit more school spirit, participate in school activities and report feeling good about being a student at their school (Gregory, 1992).

Limited curriculum offerings were seen as the achilles heel of small high schools. Conant's work in *The Comprehensive High School* (1967) led many educators to believe bigger was better, offering high school students more curricular choices. High schools with enrollments of from 700 to 2000 began to be more prevalent, particularly in the urban centers (Gottfredson, 1985). Yet, in a 1990 study of New York City schools done by the Rand Corporation, it was determined that students learn more when exposed to a more frugal curriculum. The findings show students learn more from a simpler, more centralized curricular. They proposed that fewer course offerings also foster a greater feeling of community.

Klonsky (1995) and Raywid (1995), and others report that large school size hurts attendance and dampens enthusiasm for involvement in school activities. Large schools tend to have lower grade averages and standardized test scores coupled with higher drop out rates and more problems with violence, security and drugs. Lee and Smith (1996) found that large schools need more layers of support and administrative staff to handle increased bureaucratic demands. Large schools offer more specialized programs for disadvantaged students and disabled youth, but these students often express feelings of isolation and alienation. Meier (1995) sees these large high schools as settings with social stratification as the norm. The athletes and high academic achieving students receive daily close contact with adults, both in school and out. However, 70 to 80 percent of students report membership in social groups with no adult contact. Klonsky concludes that large schools function like bureaucracies, while



small schools function like communities. This characterizes large schools as generally working inefficiently as an impersonal institution creating personal loneliness for many students (Klonsky, 1995).

The literature on school size often makes a connection between student success and drop out rates. Ornstein (1990) posits that school size does effect the ease or difficulty with which student needs are met. At-risk youth in particular are seen as least served in large anonymous high schools. Efforts to pare these public schools down to more manageable units has been a trend over the last two decades (Queen, 2002). The proliferation of house systems, academies and other school-within-a- school grade configurations, all have the goal of making the school more user friendly by downsizing the overwhelming scale of the large high school.

Small school size addresses the needs of a higher percentage of students across socioeconomic levels (Meier, 1996). The setting of small schools encourages teachers to innovate which motivates students to participate and results in greater community for both groups (Wells, 1996). In Meier's work, more positive attitudes and greater satisfaction results in higher grades and test scores, improved attendance rates and lowered drop out rates. She identifies seven reasons as to why smaller schools of 300 to 400 students work best:

1. Governance. Easier communications happen when all staff can meet around a common table.
2. Respect. Students and teachers form positive relationships as they get to know each other well.
3. Simplicity. Individualized instruction and care is easier with less bureaucracy.
4. Safety. Teachers can respond quickly to behavior that violates the community standards and strangers are easily identified for security purposes.
5. Parent Involvement. Alliances are more easily formed with parents when they believe teachers know and care about their child's progress.

6. Accountability. Bureaucratic data is not needed to determine how a student, teacher or school is doing. Everyone knows.

7. Belonging. Every student is part of a community or social group that contains an adult, not just the academic and athletic stars.

These characteristics in schools are especially important in meeting the needs of adolescents. Research on small schools indicates that the student-teacher ratio must be kept at a manageable rate. The advantages to smaller school settings are clear. Teachers and students know each other better, students can not hide or get easily lost, and there is more of a sense of community. Sommers (1997) talks about and increased "ambiance of learning" in smaller schools. He defines this as "the optimum atmosphere or climate to permit maximum learning. The atmosphere is warmer, more cohesive and safe". School staff identify smaller classes as a significant feature for improved student/teacher relationships. Researchers also support this claim. Ornstein (1990) argues that largeness in schools is a negative factor. "Even if we can not agree on the optimum size, largeness is considered socially and psychologically detrimental (Sommers, 1997, p. 11).

It may seem obvious to some but Hertzog and Morgan (1996) found that students provide valuable feedback on the transition to high school. In their study of student perceptions on the transition to high school, opportunities to meet high school staff before starting high school rated high in their ranking of factors leading to a smooth transition. They also cited smaller classes in high school and interdisciplinary projects (which make more explicit the connections between courses or subjects) as key elements to improving student performance and increasing the likelihood of a smooth transition.

In summary, this first section presented the three elements most influencing school transitions: knowledge of child development by adults in and out of the school, the relationships between student and teacher, home and school, and the establishment of curriculum and school settings which reflect their needs. All are essential elements to the transition process independent of age. The adolescent, however, presents a more critical challenge in their transition to high school because of the seriousness of their decisions and the impact on their future.

## II. High School Structures

School Setting. As discussed in the last section, high school presents a high stakes circumstance with more intense academic and peer pressure, especially in larger settings, and not often seen as welcoming by ninth graders. Mizelle (1995) found that with more and more communities focusing on college and higher learning, the failure in high school, (as determined by failing grades, high absenteeism, drop out rates, (Owings & Peng, 1992) high pregnancy rates, drug use and other high risk behavior (Parades, 1991)) is even more significant and damaging to the individual and to society.

The literature indicates that the ninth grade year, because of a variety of factors, puts ninth graders "at risk" more than any other high school grade. Eccles, Lord and Buchanan (1996) report that the effects of achievement on motivation is particularly strong among adolescents. Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, and Trickett, (1991) adds to this premise that the ninth grader be given additional social supports to address the challenges of the transition to high school. Felner, Primavera, and Cauce, (1981) further support the importance of social support and environmental structure for promoting student success at this junction in their education. The primary variables attributed to their call for more support are directly related to the nature of change and transition.

Simmons and Bythe (1987) also highlight the need for social support and structure. This is further stressed in Meier 's work (1996) which is particularly notable as one looks at the environmental structures during the transition from small school settings to large school settings. Smith's (1997) research results indicates that the change is most often characterized by poor academic performance, increased absences, increased behavior problems and decreased activity in extra curricular activities. The work of Reinhard (1997) and Fritzer and Herbst (1996) and a report from the U.S. Census Bureau (1992) points to the extensive efforts many high schools and middle schools exert to develop programs to address this transition. The programs fall into three areas: to address overwhelming size of the high school, to better address academic issues, and to better address social/emotional pressures.

Other studies focus specifically on school size as an important factor in the transition to high school as discussed in the previous section on the benefits of small schools. The advantages to smaller school settings are clear according to Meier (1996). Teachers and students know each other better, students can not hide or get lost easily and, there is more of a sense of community. Again, Sommers (1997) work focuses on the increased "ambiance of learning" in smaller schools. Ornstein (1990) agrees that largeness in schools is a negative factor. An agreed upon exact number for the optimum teacher/student ratio may not be possible but there is agreement among these researchers that large schools are considered socially and psychologically detrimental to learning.

Queen (2002) further supports the premise that a smaller school setting for ninth graders builds closer relationship between teachers and students thus making for a more successful transition. The first five of his twelve factors for successful transitions are most relevant for this study as they specifically focus on school size and student/teacher relationships. They include:

- 1.) The larger the high school, the greater the negative impact of transition on ninth grade students.
- 2.) Ninth grade students' adjustments to high school are complicated by their perceptions of a bigger school, different environment, changed class schedule and smaller classes.
- 3.) Fear of getting lost in the high school building is by far the number one fear of ninth grade students.
- 4.) Ninth grade students view high school teachers less helpful than middle school teachers.
- 5.) Ninth grade students must have at least one adult in their lives for genuine support in order to become academically and socially successful.

Queen recommends that transition programs provide students with social support and include teaming among teachers for academic support and collaboration between the sending and receiving schools.

According to Parades (1987) the ninth grade year has the highest student enrollment but 22% repeat ninth grade, their grade point average is amongst the lowest in high school, and more students drop out of the ninth grade than any other grade level. A significant number of those who do not drop out have a higher number of absences, more disciplinary problems and failing grades. The grades are more a result of poor attendance and behavior issues than of ability or learning difficulties. These factors lead educators to identify strategies to address these issues. Most of these strategies make up the foundation of the transition programs.

High schools which recognize the extent to which peer influence impacts the adolescent are ready to devise programs which reflect this understanding. Programs that help students find the balance between appropriate peer interactions and school obligations offset the decline in grades and attendance many experience and provide students with lifelong skills (Barone & Aguirre-Deandreis, 1991). Students view themselves more negatively and experience an increased need for friendships (Hertzog

et al., 1996) and by the end of tenth grade, as many as 6% drop out of school (Ownings & Peng, 1992). For middle school students, including "high achieving" or "gifted," the transition to high school can be an unpleasant experience (Phelan, Yu & Davidson, 1994). Learning to negotiate the management of their time between meeting their school responsibilities and meeting their needs socially are seen as key elements of a transition program from eighth to ninth grade (Queen, 2002).

In Catterall's 1998 study of resilience in at risk students during the transition from middle school to high school, the top three factors students identified for why they dropped out of school by grade ten included the following: they didn't like school, they didn't like teachers and/or they were failing their classes. The next three factors were that they had to get a job, their friends had dropped out and/or they didn't feel safe at school. Catterall's results suggest that resilience, as indicated by improved attendance and academic performance, can develop in groups of students seen as at-risk for dropping out if the following four factors are considered in the creation of transition programs: the nature of school responsiveness to students, the level of student participation in school activities, school safety, and the nature of family support to students for success in school. These factors are seen again and again in the literature about the transition to high school. This is particularly so for students who exhibit at risk behaviors as characterized by one or more of these conditions: poor attendance, poor grades and test scores (Hartos & Power, 1997), limited to absent parent involvement, (Hertzog & Morgan, 1996), and poor teacher and peer interactions, (Horn & West, 1992), and drug use (Catterall, 1994). Mizelle (1995), Hertzog & Morgan (1996), Mac Iver & Epstein (1991) and several other researchers indicate that interventions by effective transitional programs begin to help students address these obstacles to school success. These researchers affirm the findings of Bry & George (1980) who studied the preventive effects of early intervention on the attendance and

grades of early adolescents.

Felner et al (1982) also looked at primary preventions in school transitions. They concluded that the interventions which targeted the promotion of positive peer social activities and adult support coupled with optimal school structures that help address the primary needs of the adolescent, improved relationships with peers and teachers and increased academic confidence and performance, all of which lead to success in high school.

Teachers Perspectives. Erickson (1982) has written that whether in school or out, teachers' implicit and explicit beliefs about learning are part of the student's learning environment. Children learn very early the feel of their classrooms. They develop beliefs and attitudes about learning just as they do other factual information. As time passes, Erickson (1982) writes, students may not recall the factual information but they do remember the feel of a classroom or grade and where they were placed as a learner. The adults play a vital role, in and out of school, in helping students become healthy life long learners. These beliefs become part of their "enduring selves" and is a perception based on early socialization (Spindler & Spindler, 1989). Erickson goes on to state that in contrast to the enduring self, the "situated self" is the part of ourselves that changes and continually adapts according to new settings and cultural values. This lifelong process of growth, change and inevitable school transitions, converge between reconciling our situated self with our enduring self.

Teachers' perspectives on the structure of high schools and the impact of positive relationships with students is most related to class size, subject matter and advocacy or advisory programs. Lounsbury and Clark (1990) examined eighth graders in the eighth grade setting. Teachers relationships were enhanced by opportunities to work on interdisciplinary projects with colleagues and students.

Teachers also reported interest in serving as advocates in advisory programs which have a more academic focus rather than a social/emotional focus.

Wells' (1996) work centered on whether adults can achieve real connections with adolescents. He cites those researchers who have assumed detached participant observer roles when working with students. Others have explored the adult-adolescent relationships. Wax (1979) purports that building rapport with adolescents is a key element in developing trust and enhancing learning. Noddings (1992) and Bosworth (1992) add that students in classes with teachers where there is a sense of care and trust are more willing to take intellectual risks.

This section sought to identify the structural obstacles in high schools which impede student success during the transition process. Multiple factors converge on the adolescent and the school settings which require multiple responses from the school. They include smaller class sizes to promote more positive student/teacher relationships; identification of at-risk students, active support from parents, more adult support within the school and among and between teachers from the middle school grades and the high school.

### III. Transitional Programs

Transitional programs have received more attention in the literature in the last ten years. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) produced pivotal work on the needs of American adolescents as they enter high school. It highlighted the importance of eighth to ninth grade transitions in its report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989). Their national study examined the fateful choices this age group makes and the transformation that is needed in the educational institutions which houses them.



This report has been widely referenced and since its publication, an emergence of transitional programs across the nation has occurred.

There are several themes which exist in the literature on successful transition programs. Weldy (1995) found that the overarching themes are communication and collaboration with students and parents between school and home. The approaches of transitional programs that seem to have the greatest impact, according to Smith (1996), fall in three categories: programs targeting students, programs targeting students and parents, and programs targeting staff, students and parents. Hertzog and Morgan (1998) found that school demographics also dictate program features but the essence of these programs remains the same: structured transitional programs which coordinate efforts within schools and between schools which prepare students and parents for the transition.

Gatta, McCabe and Edgar (1997) report that the primary characteristic of the successful transitional program relies heavily on the level of adult support students receive from the middle school to high school. Differences were observed in studies where the number of transitions within a school district had an influence on the success of the program (Mizelle, 1995). With multiple schools planning transition programs, such as school districts with one or more K-5 elementary schools, 6-8 middle schools and 9-12 high schools, the adult collaboration is much more complicated because more are involved. Mizelle argues that the coordination of these multiple transitions falls on the adults in both the sending and receiving schools. The transition programs that targets all three groups, staff, students and parents, increase the likelihood of a high level of adult support and smoother transition to high school (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998).

Factors Influencing Transitional Programs. Several transitional programs examined by Queen (2002) and Mizelle (1995) point to the following seven factors in helping adolescents through the transition from middle school grades to high school:

- start the transition program in the spring of the 8th grade year;
- establish opportunities for eighth graders and parents to visit the high school prior to their official entrance;
- identify at-risk students to ninth grade staff before the end of the eighth grade year;
- include parents and students in planning course selections with eighth grade teachers;
- provide a summer experience for those who have academic and social issues that includes a preview of ninth grade work;
- bring ninth graders into the school for an orientation before the older students return; and
- create a separate floor, wing or building for ninth graders only, particularly in large school settings.

These factors constitute a cadre of activities which target students, middle school and high school staff and parents. Together they make the transition a key focus for educators working with this age group. Mac Iver (1990) has determined that a high school transition program includes a variety of activities that (1) provide students and parents with information about the new school, (2) provide students with social support during the transition, and (3) bring middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements. As an example, in Philadelphia's Sunrise Middle School, Oates and colleagues (1998) found that students who participated in a Community for Learning Program (CFL) were more successful in their transition into high school than students who had not participated. The key components of the CFL program were support and training for teachers, a learning management system for middle school students to help them develop a sense

of responsibility for their learning and behavior, and an emphasis on community and family involvement.

According to Alspaugh (1998), other factors contribute to the high school transition: student participation in extra curricular activities, family background, personal problems and school related problems. Relationships between teachers and students and smaller school size are also factors which contribute to staying in school and better attendance to school; two outcomes which determine student success, not only in school but also in life.

Queen (2002) offers one of the most inclusive studies of this topic. He argues that effective and comprehensive transition programs help: build a sense of community; respond to the needs and concerns of students; and provide appropriate, multifaceted approaches in order to facilitate the transition process. He further postulates that there are many factors which contribute to either the success or failure of students in transition. He found students identified four primary categories contributed to the challenges of transition to high school: relationships with teachers, academic difficulties, adjusting to the school environment, and peer or social pressure. They also indicated that the family served as a strong source of support. Again, the additional resource of supportive adults, whether family or school staff, is noted in the work examined in the meta-analysis of transition programs examined by Queen.

A study by Julia B. Smith in 1996 used a national sample of public school students to look at the effectiveness of middle school transition programs on high school retention and student performance. Results suggest that programs targeting a combination of students, parents and staff in assisting students to make this transition have a measured impact, even after accounting for student demographics, family characteristics and student behavior. Smith found that the most positive influence on

student retention and performance came from those programs in which students experienced a full transition program that targeted the combination of students, parents and school staff. Partial programs showed no independent impact on improved student outcomes. Those without any formal transition program fared the worst. This study reinforces the need for middle schools and elementary schools which serve a k-8 population to work closely with high school staff to provide transition programs for eighth graders. In particular, this study emphasizes the three prong audience approach, in targeting students-parents-staff, as the best transition plan to reach, retain and improve student performance.

Recent studies reflect student perspectives on the transition process. Phelan, Yu, & Davidson (1994) posits that ninth graders look forward to high school in order to have more freedom to choose classes, activities and friends. However, Queen (2002) reveals that the incoming ninth grader expresses concerns of being picked on by older students, having more difficult academic classes, making lower grades, and getting lost in an unfamiliar school setting. Mizelle (1999) describes their anxiety as leading to a very unpleasant transition if schools do not ease this process with well designed transition programs. These programs, according to the supportive research from Hertzog & Morgan (1996), should include the following: information to parents and students, activities that provide social support, and activities that bring middle school and high school educators together. Parents play a pivotal role in the transition process and it is again stressed in Mizelle's work as well. The elements of these transitional programs are examined more closely.

Transitional Programs for Ninth Graders. Transitions were the focus of a three year study co-sponsored by the National Association Secondary School Principals (NASSP) with the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers and the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (Weldy, 1995). The project looked at seven schools representing a variety of school districts, large, small, urban, suburban and rural. Researchers studied the various aspects of the K-12 transition process for students and developed and evaluated programs in order to strengthen transitions. The study revealed early in the research that the middle years were most critical in the overall school transition process for students. This proved to be the case not only because of the difficult adjustment of the early adolescent years, but also because of the importance of receiving and sending students successfully on both sides of the middle level. The researchers learned that strong transition programs do not happen by chance, but are planned and executed with all the appropriate parties at all levels involved, are scheduled in a timely manner, and provide students with information and experiences to prepare them for the next level (Weldy, 1995).

The NASSP project defined and described the four most critical elements in this transition process as communication, cooperation, consensus and commitment.

1.) Under the communication element, the emphasis is on communication between the sending and receiving schools. The sending schools should provide information about each student, including achievement, special needs, and behavior problems. The receiving schools should provide information to incoming students and their parents about the school's program, its building, its services, policies, and expectations. In addition, the schools in the NASSP project, emphasized the importance of feedback from the receiving schools as a viable means to effectively assess the transition

program based on how well their students do at the next level. The feedback should be specific and helpful, including grades and test scores and attendance records.

2.) Cooperation is an essential element in a strong transition program. In the NASSP project, administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and even some students should plan the activities that will ensure a smooth transition. Students proved to be especially helpful in identifying and describing the problems and challenges they encountered in moving from one level of schooling to the next higher level. The project stressed the importance of key people in all schools planning together for all the activities that are designed to help students through the transition process.

3.) Consensus requires that the key people involved in the planning agree about what programs should be in place and who will be responsible. The project researchers argue that consensus will not be difficult if everyone who participates in the transition process is involved in its planning.

4.) Communication, cooperation and consensus will fall short of the strength needed for the transition programs if those who have communicated and planned do not have the commitment to follow up and carry out the transitional plans.

The NASSP project also highlighted the critical role of parents in the middle level transitions. The schools point to a caring, involved, supporting parent as the most important ingredient in a student's success in school (Weldy, 1995). This is particularly the case when moving from one level of schooling to another. Parents need to know about new policies and organizational procedures, rules and behavior expectations, grading, homework, retention, acceleration and promotion policies. As for the transition program, parents should be involved by serving on committees, advisory groups and special transition groups for parents.

The four C's of the NASSP project are elements also found in the sample of transitional programs researched for this study. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics estimated that in the 1999-2000 school year, there were 128 ninth grade academies in the U. S. (Murray, Sussex Bureau Reporter, 2003). With the proliferation of ninth grade transitional programs over the last ten years (Queen, 2002), the last section of this study examines a sample of these programs. They are from across the United States, most are public schools and most were generated from several internet search engines.

One common theme in all the programs is the clear understanding that ninth graders need special attention because of the challenges they face during this period of physical, emotional and intellectual flux. This age group is separating themselves from their usual adult supports, parents, and other family, and is moving closer to peer dependence for affirmation and identification (Wattenburg, 1974). The transitional programs reviewed all recognized the developmental challenges for ninth graders and sought to establish programs designed to support these students. With this understanding of adolescents' needs, three primary areas emerge in each program: (1.) that there is explicit information sharing for students and parents (Mizelle, 1999), (2.) that there are social supports and activities which allow opportunities for students to meet and interact with tenth through twelfth grade students, (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999) and (3.) that there are opportunities to bring middle school and high school staff together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements (Mac Iver, 1990).

In response to meeting the needs of ninth graders, many school districts continue to develop transition programs. Reinhard (1997) pointed out that several

districts across the country were creating ninth grade programs. She reported that Chicago set up "junior academies" for 9th and 10th graders in which they receive mandatory counseling and study a basic curriculum in a distinct part of their high schools. Schools in the Los Angeles Unified school district had 60 teachers act as mentors to incoming ninth graders to enhance the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Hewins (1995) reported that in Tacoma, Washington, the Freshman Getaway is a great example of middle school-high school collaboration to support the transition to high school. This twelve hour ninth grade orientation program, occurring over three to five days in late August, begins the spring before students enter the high school. The transitional program in Pueblo, Colorado has a similar format according to Pantleo (1999): middle school and high school students attend a study skills class, eighth graders attend a spring conference, every eighth grader has a shadow day at the high school where each is paired with a high school student who volunteers to participate; high school counselors and eighth graders along with their parents visit the high school to select courses with recommendations from their eighth grade teachers; ninth graders are paired with peer mentors who visit before high school begins and mentor throughout the first year.

The Patuxent High School Ninth Grade Academy in Calvert County, Maryland is located in one wing of the building. The classrooms and a computer lab are connected and serve ninth graders only. Four teams of core curriculum teachers, English, math, social studies and science share classrooms that are close to each other. Each team of teachers works with about 100 students. There is administrative and counselor support designated for ninth graders only. The Ninth Grade Academy at Wheaton High School in Silver Springs, Maryland is similar but also outlines assessments or progress markers



to quantify the success of the program. Their mission is to assist the incoming freshman make a smooth transition to the rigors of high school. Their goal is to provide programs and supports addressing the unique needs of entering freshman. The program's effectiveness is determined by the following five objectives:

- 1.) The passing rate of students from grade 9 to 10 will increase by 5%.
- 2.) The percentage of students losing credit and/or failing one or more courses during the year will decrease by 5%.
- 3.) The average GPA of freshman will increase by 25% for each sub-group of the population.
- 4.) The percentage of freshman who pass the countryside end of course exam and/or the Algebra 1 and Biology, will increase by 5% for each sub-group of the population.
- 5.) The percentage of freshman who are eligible to participate in extracurricular activities in each sub-group of the population, and the participation levels in these activities will increase at the same levels for each sub-group of the populations (Patuxent High School website, 2003).

Incoming Wheaton freshman are assigned to a house of 80-100 students. The house system randomly assigns students to teams of teachers in a set of rooms specifically reserved for freshman located on the third floor in a designated part of the building. Teacher-student ratio is 1:20 with an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that uses real world projects and problems. Teachers serve as educational advisors and mentors in an advisor/advisee program. The program operates on a modified block schedule with frequent contact with parents. The benefits of the program have been determined to be increased academic achievement, reduced discrepancies in the

achievement gap that plague poorer children and, too often, children of color, and stronger student-teacher relationships (Wheaton High School website, 2003).

Dianna Lindsay, former co-chair of the Harvard University Principal's Center and principal of Worthington Kilbourne High School in Columbus, Ohio (1997) has the eighth to ninth grade transition divided into three phases, Vitality, Interest and Meaning. In the Vitality phase, administrators work together to ensure a smooth transition is planned. Parents and their children first hear from the school principal in the fall of eighth grade year. Introductions of appropriate personnel (counselors, administrators, department heads) are made. Curricula offerings are discussed in detail with sample schedules for parents to review, along with emergency medical information, athletic and extra curricular activities and other opportunities. Social and behavioral expectations are clearly articulated. The school is open for a tour and school personnel are available for personal conferences. Parents receive a three ring binder which includes an agenda for the evening, necessary registration forms, school newsletters, timelines, due dates, curricular offerings. Both parents and students are given an opinion questionnaire to learn about the student from the parent's perspective and learn from the students' perspective their hopes, fears and goals for high school. The feedback is useful for school personnel and helps determine the services to offer certain students.

In the Interest Phase of the transition, eighteen people from the high school look over the data collected from parents and students and consult with middle school staff to determine best course placement and support services needed. If scheduling questions arise, parents are contacted. The relationship with parents is

built prior to the student's arrival to the high school and sets a positive tone for an ongoing partnership. In late spring, students visit the high school and are assigned a junior student who serves as host. Eighth graders visit classes, meet student leaders of clubs and sports teams and have lunch with their junior host. The students then return to their schools, debrief the experience with their classroom teachers and write thank you notes to their junior hosts.

In the Meaning phase, students have arrived for the first day of school when there are only freshmen in the building. A formal assembly provides students with the information and introductions needed to begin the school year. Rules and expectations are reviewed and students visit their classes before all the other students arrive. Seniors (the former junior hosts) escort the freshmen to their homerooms after a tour of the school. Homeroom teachers review the school handbook, the students' schedule, answer questions and help with lockers or other concerns. Lunch for the first day for freshman is a cookout and the whole day's activities are videotaped. The videotape is released at the parent/student evening assembly that night. Parents hear the same speakers as the students and are escorted about the building by their freshman. At the end of the first day, freshmen are asked to evaluate the day and their input helps to shape the transition for the next year. Parental informal evaluation occurs at the September Open House. Parents complete a questionnaire about how their child is adjusting to high school. Feedback shows parents are more than pleased with each phase of the transitional program. Lindsay (1997) argues that vitality in planning, interest in the individual's concern about high school, and meaning in rituals is why the transitional program is effective.

Several programs in Massachusetts target ninth graders as they transition from middle school to high school. In the relatively small town of Milford, the freshman mentoring program is designed to ease the transition from the two middle schools to the one high school. The program begins in January of the 8th grade year with a visit from high school counselors to discuss course selections with teachers, students and parents along with the eighth grade teachers. Later in the spring, students visit the high school and meet with older students who are assigned to small groups of eighth graders. These high school students are the mentors to help the incoming ninth graders during their transition year (Milford High School Orientation booklet, 2001).

Cambridge Public Schools in Massachusetts is a large urban school district. It has ten kindergarten to eighth grade elementary schools that feed into one high school. The transition program for eighth graders involves a comprehensive plan to meet with students and parents during the spring of the eighth grade year to share details of the transition process. The one high school is divided into smaller learning communities in an effort to make the large anonymous setting more personal and less intimidating (Cambridge Public Schools website, 2003).

Separate Facilities for Ninth Graders. Throughout the nation, high schools have tried to respond to the issue of transition, particularly, when they are within large urban centers and with at risk adolescents. The number of separate buildings or separate facilities for ninth graders has grown over the last decade. Most of these facilities were created in response to a few issues: a population surge in school districts at the middle or high school level, a long-standing concern about the transition process, and/or as an opportunity for restructuring and/or the renovation

of large high schools buildings (Murray, 2003).

A sampling from the search of public ninth grade schools, academies, and facilities show a proliferation of these programs over the last decade (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). More and more high schools have developed more of these separate facilities, often as a result of renovation or the creation of a new high school. They are presented here as high schools with ninth grade transitional programs housed in a separate facility or wing in various parts of the US. They are often called Ninth Grade Academies and below is a sample from an internet search:

1.) Montclair High School in Montclair, New Jersey has about 400 ninth graders housed in a separate building. The Ninth Grade Academy has its own faculty, staff and administrators who know students names, interests, goals, academic strengths and weaknesses and students know them. The students receive individualized instruction and personal attention. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning is part of the students' experience. Each course gives special instruction in time management and study skills. All ninth graders take a Global Research course which focuses on active and contextual learning and developing the students' problem solving and critical thinking skills. Parents and students attend an orientation program during the first days of ninth grade. Students and parents are familiarized with the building's physical structure, rules and expectations, resources and staff members. High school tenth through twelfth graders introduce ninth graders to extra curricular clubs, sports teams and activities available at the school. An informational handbook for incoming ninth graders is sent to families in August before they enter high school. Parents are invited to join a parent steering committee that meets monthly with assistant principal

and parent liaison. Parents have an opportunity to follow a ninth grader on "Follow a Freshman" day in the fall. The purpose of this event was to give parents a chance to more fully

understand what a student's day is like. Parents followed their student's schedule and experienced the change of classes and the transition from room to room in crowded halls in a timely manner. Two evening meetings were scheduled for parents. One was with the guidance counselors, student assistant counselors, child study team members and security officers to address the issues of social adjustment. The other was with guidance counselors to begin planning for sophomore course selection process. Both these meetings are followed up by a mailing that conveyed much of the same information to people who were unable to attend. "The socials, the special instruction, the parent seminars, the courses...all are designed so that our ninth grade students have skills, confidence, and information they need to help ensure their successful transition to Montclair High School" (Montclair High School Ninth Grade Academy website, 2003).

2.) Huron High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan stresses the connection to adults as a key to preparation for success in high school for ninth graders. In their Ninth Grade Academy, all ninth graders are scheduled into cohorts of 75 in which they take their core subjects. Teachers work in teams to create small groups of students who work with teachers as advisors. The interdisciplinary blocks are integral parts of the ninth grade schedule with English, social studies and science curriculum taught as an interdisciplinary core. Teachers also provide academic support to all students who are identified in eighth grade as at risk for academic failure. The support is scheduled into the school day and is also available to any student who fails one or more class in the first term. There is also a program to support promising students. This program helps build student confidence and encourages them to select more challenging courses. The comprehensive guidance model works to deepen the

connection between guidance counselors and students. The counselors work with small groups of students to plan their high school courses, and address social and emotional development issues using values clarification techniques. Expanded athletic and extra curricular activities are offered to ninth graders to further their interest in programs designed for their social and physical growth. A summer program is offered to all ninth graders in a three day workshop to begin student/teacher relationships and teach study skills and paths to success in high school (Huron High School, website, 2003).

3.) Kettering High School in Detroit, Michigan has ninth graders receiving special attention from guidance counselors, study a basic curriculum and attend most of their classes in one wing of the high school. Teachers are assigned to ninth graders only and work in teams. Their closer connections have help decreased student absenteeism, improve academic success and decreased drop out rate (Reinhard, 1997).

4.) Morrison and Legters (2001) provided research for Baltimore's Patterson High School as they created a Ninth Grade Success Academy. They showed evidence that the urban ninth graders, many of whom have little support or positive reinforcement outside of school, need an especially caring, consistent, disciplined and engaging school environment. Concrete data was presented to show the significant gains made once Patterson's Success Academy was in place. In the first year, student attendance increased by 10%, without the end-of-year-fall-off that schools often experience. In the second year, daily ninth grade student attendance was often above 80%, which was substantially higher than most of the ninth grade attendance at most of the other large, non selective high schools in Baltimore. The improved attendance at Patterson's Success Academy resulted in greater numbers of ninth graders passing their courses and earning promotion to tenth grade. Eighty-five percent of Patterson's ninth graders earned promotion at the end of the Success Academy's first year of operation. This was

a complete reversal from two years prior when only 15% earned promotion.

The central features of the Ninth Grade Success Academy at Patterson are as follows: self-contained setting with its own administrators and teaching staff, physically separate from the rest of the school building; interdisciplinary teams of four teachers organized around core subject areas, English, math, social studies and science who have common planning time to address individual student problems, coordinate instruction, and plan team activities, sharing 150-200 students; flexible schedules with extended periods of 80 to 90 minutes as needed for student-centered instructional approaches; double dose curriculum in English and math to address the needs of many urban students who enter ninth grade poorly prepared; and summer support to all students around study skills and preview of academic demands of high school (Patterson Ninth Grade Success Academy website, 2003).

5.) San Benito Veterans' Memorial High School in San Benito, Texas has created a Ninth Grade Academy to help first time ninth graders transition from a small middle school to the large and academically challenging San Benito High School. The Academy's primary purpose is to provide support academically and socially to entering ninth graders. The academy is on the grounds of the high school campus and allows for some opportunities to take elective courses with 10-12 grade students. Core courses are taught at the academy with a core team of teachers. The organization of the academy is similar to that of the middle school, teams of teachers who teach the core curriculum of English, math, social studies and science, serve as resources and supports to a small number of students for the entire ninth grade year. The courses offered are geared to lay the foundation for a successful high school experience (San Benito Veteran's Memorial Ninth Grade Academy website, 2003).



6.) Ocean Springs High School, in Ocean Springs, Mississippi discusses the rationale for the creation of its ninth grade academy by citing the research on the needs of ninth graders. They point to the transition from middle school to high school as a troubling time for students. This period is characterized as a time of physical, emotional, and intellectual flux, with the sudden change to secondary school can be stressful, complex, and even overwhelming. Feelings of apprehension, insecurity, and a sense of not belonging are often accelerated in large, impersonal high school settings. They cite the report of the National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as evidence for the need to create smaller learning environments consisting of no more than 600 students. This also further cites the ninth grader as having the greatest problems adapting to school culture and expectations. As a result of these feelings of turmoil, students experience behavioral, social and academic problems (Ocean Springs High School website, 2003).

The salient features outlined for Ocean Springs High School Ninth Grade Academy include the following: providing core courses (English, math , social studies and science) in a separate facility just for ninth graders; academic, social and physical growth support services are geared solely for ninth graders and made available at the ninth grade academy; community partnerships are forged to work as a team with school personnel, parents and area businesses who contribute time and financial support to the academy students; parent grade level meetings are held to inform parents of policies, procedures and curriculum expectations; mentoring program matching ninth graders with Chamber of Commerce role models and peer mentoring with select students from the junior and senior class; teacher training and staff development allow ongoing review and reflection of instructional strategies and interdisciplinary programs to meet the wide range of student needs (Ocean Springs High School website, 2003).

7.) Forsyth Central High School in Forsyth, Georgia outlines its Ninth Grade Academy as a separate facility with an assistant principal who functions as building principal for the ninth grade building located in the West Campus classrooms. They describe the setting as an extension of Forsyth Central High School. A school of students, teachers and parents working together in cooperative learning teams to plan strategies for individual student success. Their mission is to educate the student and make the student's transition to the secondary school setting a smooth one. It provides nurturing environment, enhances self-esteem, promotes responsible citizenship, fosters desires for lifelong learning, and develops skills necessary for future success in life. Desired outcomes include increased student achievement, lower dropout rate, and increased grade level promotions.

To achieve the above, the academy teachers work as an interdisciplinary team that moves on with the students as they enter the next grades; teachers have common planning time to standardize expectations, plan interdisciplinary assignments, plan team conferences with students and parents which includes support staff such as counselors and special educators; each team establishes a common system of procedures and practices and work to problem solve issues not limited to the classroom or academic concerns (Forsyth Central High School website, 2003).

8.) A former Naval housing complex serves as the Savannah Academy, a school campus for ninth graders only from the Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach, California. The academy was created to help ease the overcrowding at the district's five high schools and offer students a year of more personalized classroom instruction. The Savannah students attend smaller classes than other schools, with a maximum of 30 students and a total academy enrollment of 270. Classes extend to 100 minutes, lasting twice as long as regular classes. Instruction emphasizes the

development of technology and math skills. All ninth graders must complete an algebra course. The academy has the highest computer-student ratio in the district, and provides access to educational software, the internet and 100 mac computers equipped with CD-Rom drives (Urban Education, December, 1995).

9.) Cape Henlopen Ninth Grade Academy and Lewes Ninth Grade Academy in Delaware are examples of a school district's efforts to address issues of transition from the eighth to ninth grade and resolve a problem of overcrowding. Two new middle schools were built in the district which allowed the conversion of an old middle school to become an elementary school. This enabled the district to handle increased enrollments and provided ninth graders a separate facility in the other old middle school. This became the Lewes Ninth Grade Academy. The renovation of this old middle school provided the innovative changes of accommodating ninth graders in a facility of their own with technology wiring in the building for more widespread access. Teachers of ninth graders only remain with the group the entire year. Activities included ninth grade only sports, drama performances and athletic teams.

Murray (2003) cites the work of Hertzog and Morgan (1997) as evidence of the growing trend to establish separate facilities for ninth graders. She reports that the district had a ninth grade only school in 1991 because of crowded classroom conditions. Once more space became available, the district went back to a traditional high school with grades 9-12. District educators realized the ninth grade academy concept was catching on nationally, but until the creation of the temporary setting more than ten years ago, was not considered a permanent configuration for the district's high school. Teachers reported a loss of some of the benefits of having ninth graders in a separate facility when they moved back to the traditional setting, more confused ninth graders, less cohesiveness in providing support and collaboration and poorer grades and behavior during the ninth grade year. There was a push to revisit

establishing a ninth grade academy when the new middle schools were built (Murray, 2003).

In Cape Henlopen, the Ninth Grade Academy is in a separate building with a separate staff a short drive from the high school. Ninth graders participate in the same extracurricular programs as the high school students. Core courses, English, math, social studies and science are taught at the academy by the core teachers who also serve as academic advisors. Parents are involved in the transition to the academy during the spring of the eighth grade year and during the first month of school in the fall (Murray, 2003).

This final section provided a review of the transitional programs for students moving from eighth to ninth grade from a variety of different school districts from around the United States. Looking at the salient features of these programs and descriptions of the separate facilities of some high schools which have been established for ninth graders, a comprehensive set of criteria emerge as essential for a smooth transition. These features line up almost exactly as Queen (2002) puts forth for ninth graders to succeed. The criteria that emerges from this sampling include:

- 1.) provide core courses (English, math , social studies and science) just for ninth graders along with academic, social-emotional and physical growth support services geared solely for ninth graders, particularly at risk students
- 2.) create a separate facility /wing or floor to isolate ninth graders, particularly in large urban high schools with hundreds of students entering as ninth graders;
- 3.) collaboration between sending school staff and receiving school staff to organize information sharing and visits for students and parents during the spring, summer and first days of school;
- 4.) teachers are assigned ninth graders only and receive training and professional

development to be sure there is an understanding of the needs of ninth graders

5.) teachers work as an interdisciplinary team that moves on with the students as they enter the next grades;

6.) teachers have common planning time to standardize expectations, plan interdisciplinary assignments, plan team conferences with students and parents which includes support staff such as counselors and special educators; each team establishes a common system of procedures and practices and work to problem solve issues not limited to the classroom or academic concerns;

7.) provide opportunities for ninth graders to work with junior/senior students in mentoring type programs before and after the school year has started; and

8.) provide extra curricular opportunities for ninth graders only.

(See Table: Features of Sample Ninth Grade Programs)

This second chapter for this study has reviewed the literature on the transition to high school with a focus on the needs of ninth graders. It has also provided a list of ninth grade programs and separate ninth grade academies in an effort to highlight a sampling of the offerings public schools in the United States have made available for ninth graders. Chapter Three discusses the overall research design, indicating the various methodologies, and sampling techniques. This next chapter also reviews the methods of data analysis and the reporting of the data collection process.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### Introduction

The transition from middle school to high school is a pivotal time for adolescents. The literature points to an explosion of newly created transitional programs over the last ten years. Queen (2002) posits that the needs of this age group demands special attention. This includes special treatment in their academic preparation, adult and peer support, activities to promote healthy social interactions, and information for students and parents. The social/emotional needs and the academic challenges and changes create an often fearful and under prepared ninth grader (Parades, 1991). Teachers' perceptions of working with this age group are not fully represented in the literature. References to teachers' perceptions are most often found in studies on curriculum development, school climate and classroom preparation programs. The present study looked at elements of a ninth grade campus, focusing on the teachers' perceptions. This chapter explains the research approach, perspective, context and procedure, and tools used to investigate the research questions.

The premise of this study is that ninth grade teachers and ninth grade students build close working relationships when housed in a smaller school setting designated for ninth graders only. These closer working relationships provide the basis for the academic and social/emotional support that ninth graders require (Mizelle, 1996). The main purpose of the present study is to determine the perspectives of a sample of ninth grade teachers who worked at a separate ninth grade campus. The gathering of qualitative data through individual interviews of this sample of teachers

helped determine if they saw the separate setting as a way to build closer working relationships with ninth graders. This researcher believes these relationships assisted in creating a smoother transition to high school.

The qualitative research method used for this study was an observational case study using individual interviewing as the primary data source. As researcher and principal of this separate ninth grade facility, data was collected as a participant-observer (Stringer, 1996). This detailed examination of the ninth grade facility was recorded through workshop/meeting notes and observation notes from events and activities which constituted the field notes. These field notes were both descriptive and analytic as prescribed in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). In addition, the interview transcriptions of the sample of teachers completed the data sources for this study. Though student and parent input about the experience of a ninth grade campus was important to note, the teachers' interview transcriptions were the primary focus points in determining the essential elements of this eighth to ninth grade transition experience. The work of Hertzog and Morgan (1998) set the stage for determining the essential characteristics of successful middle to high school transitions, yet with no specific reference to the teachers point of view.

Queen (2002) studied various problems of ninth graders with extensive research on the various prescriptions for their transition, but again with little evidence of teacher input. His work offers one of the most inclusive studies of this topic, and he argues that effective and comprehensive transition programs help: to build a sense of community; to respond to the needs and concerns of students; and to provide appropriate, multifaceted approaches in order to facilitate the transition process. He further postulates that there are many factors which contribute to either the success or failure of students in transition. He found students identified four primary categories that

contributed to the challenges of the transition to high school: relationships with teachers, academic difficulties, adjusting to the school environment, and peer or social pressure. This research will more closely examine

Queen's first of four categories, which he states contributes to the challenges of transition to high school: the relationships with teachers. This dissertation used the qualitative method of observational case study to investigate these research questions:

1. Do teachers' believe that a separate facility for ninth graders eases the transition to high school?
2. What are the essential elements of a successful eighth to ninth grade transitional program?

### Perspective

Jaeger (1988) states that determining the method most appropriate for a particular disciplined inquiry is one of the most difficult and yet important responsibilities of a researcher. The research questions for this study primarily focused on understanding a high school transition program during a special set of circumstances or conditions. One high school's creation of a two year ninth grade school, offered an opportunity to record teachers' reactions with the intent to add to the literature on the transition to high school. The research questions are; to see if a ninth grade campus eases the transition to high school, whether relationships with at least one adult eases the transition, and to determine the elements of successful transitional programs.

Jaeger recommends multiple approaches once the research questions are clear. In examining the ninth grade school for this study, the research approach taken was that of participant-observer collecting field notes of observations of the ninth grade school



and conducting teacher interviews which recorded their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a separate ninth grade facility to ease the transition to high school.

Ethnographic research techniques were part of the data collection process as described by Frederick Erickson (1977). He declares it as an inquiry process carried out by human beings directed by a perspective that is born of experience in the research setting and from prior knowledge of the research area. As principal of the ninth grade campus, this researcher acknowledged that the relationship between the principal and the participants may influence the interview responses from teachers. Building a "methodological mosaic", Jaeger (1988, p. 17) declares is the most effective way of applying social research in the study of education in order to achieve authentic data. That mosaic for this study is the use of field notes as a participant- observer with observational case study methods and teacher interviews.

### Research Context

The main purpose of this study was to determine the initial reactions of ninth grade teachers to the concept of a separate ninth grade campus as a method to ease the transition to high school. The ninth grade campus was a two year project established while the main high school completed a major renovation. The headmaster made a decision to isolate the incoming ninth grade as only three quarters of the school could occupy the high school during the renovation process (Freshman Campus Field notes, 1997). A team of teachers and administrators were created once the principal was selected and this team designed and planned for the opening of this separate ninth grade facility, a five minute walk from the main campus buildings. The community

of this high school is very supportive of its schools. For the purpose of this study the high school and community will be referred to with the fictitious name of Danville High School.

Danville is located in eastern Massachusetts, bordered by affluent Oldtown on the west and south, and Royalston on the east, south and north. It is 4 miles from Royalston, 36 miles from Worcester, 38 miles from Providence, Rhode Island and 215 miles from New York City (Danville Town Records, 1984).

Danville was settled in 1638 and established as a town in 1705 with a Town Meeting governance that continues to this day. It was formerly a part of Royalston, a place called "Dudley River". In the town's earliest days, agriculture was the most important industry, with farms raising produce for sales in Royalston. This industry flourished between the period from the Revolutionary to the Civil War. Another very early industry was a chocolate mill, which was subsequently converted into a forge, and its water power was used to run a trip-hammer in the manufacture of hoes and shovels. This forge was used in the War of 1812 to make cannons. In 1790, a tannery was erected and from 1850 to 1870, woolen knit goods were manufactured in the town. In 1868, a scientific instruments factory was established. Charles Holtzer commenced the manufacture of electrical apparatus in 1875 and in 1880 he founded the town's telephone exchange (Town website, 2003).

The 1980 census indicates a population of 55,062, with 29,191 females (52.5%) and 25,871 males (47.5%). The 1990 census reported a population of 54,718, with 30,648 females (55.5%) and 24,070 males (45.5%). The age distribution in 1980 showed there was 19% of the population over 65 years and in 1990 it was 15%. The majority of the residents in both 1980 and 1990 census fell between the ages of 20 and 60 years (Town Bureau of Census, 1980, 1990). The age range is interesting to note. There is

a perception that Danville has a significant number of senior citizens who compete with the public schools for town dollars. They are considered to be distant from the schools and efforts are presently being made by student organizations to reach out to this segment of the community to enhance educational opportunities, improve relations, and garner support. The percentage of Danville residents over 65 years old was 15% at the time of the 1990 census. Yet, the perception of their power and influence persists despite their low numbers.

The racial makeup of the town has changed over the last twenty years. In 1980, whites made up 92.1% of the population, blacks were 1.9%, Asians, 4.2%, Hispanic, 2.1%, other 1.2 %. In 1990, the white population was 84.3%, blacks were 3.1%, Hispanic, 2.9%, and Asians doubled their numbers by increasing to 8.4% of Danville's population (U.S. Census, 1980; 1990). The 1990 census reports that 35% of the residents speak a language other than English with Asian languages dominating and Spanish speaking homes being the next highest. Educational attainment in 1990 shows that 92.9% have a high school degree or higher and 63.9% have a bachelor's degree or higher. In 1982, 42.6% of the registered voters registered as Democrats, 13.1 % are registered Republicans and 44% were unenrolled (Danville Town Records, 1984; U.S. Census, 1990). These demographics provide important clues to understanding the complexity of the research setting.

### The Public Schools

The schools enjoy a reputation as an excellent educational system with adult community education, a vibrant part of the school community. The diverse student body is touted as a strength of the system but there are only recently concerted efforts made to formalize the benefits of this diversity (Danville Public Schools, 1996).

Like many public schools, Danville is challenged by a diverse student body who bring an array of learning styles, talents, language skills, physical developments, and coping mechanisms, from different religious, racial and ethnic, socioeconomic groups and home environments. With this kind of diversity, it is imperative that public schools widen their efforts to reach all students and parents.

There is extensive support, monetarily and otherwise, from the central administration for the successful implementation of school programs (Danville Foundation Report, 2001). Identifying the principal for this ninth grade campus one year before the program began also indicated an awareness of the magnitude of the job and allowed for a transition year. It also reinforced the school system's values and how they are reflected in what the system does to promote these values in the schools and in the larger community.

There are major goals that guide the Danville School Committee and Superintendent in their decision making in financial planning, budget and policy areas (Danville Public Schools [DPS], 1996). These goals focus on how best to support the system's core values of:

- 1.) high academic achievement for all students
- 2.) excellence in teaching
- 3.) collaborative relationships
- 4.) respect for human differences

These values are the foundation for the systems three major goals which bode particularly well for the kind of financial, academic and social-emotional support that is needed for a successful educational experience at the ninth grade campus also referred to as the Freshman Campus. These goals are:

- excellence in teaching,

- curriculum renewal, and
- excellence in operations and planning.

These goals provide the critical foundation for transforming an old school facility on a major route in the town that was closed down for a new elementary school, into an exciting educational facility for ninth grade students and staff. Coupled with this separate facility was the volunteer staff of teachers, counselors and administrators (Freshman Campus Field notes, 1997). The plan was to offer a newly enhanced curriculum model with multiple forms of instruction and assessment, project-based and student-centered, while maintaining rigorous and academically challenging courses. Therefore, this campus' goals perpetuated the system's goals and core values as described above.

External grants have played a major role in supplementing innovative programming and professional development (DPS, 1996). The grants from federal, local and private foundations and organizations have been a source of pride and accomplishment for the system. The Danville Foundation is a private funding source started by the residents of the town to encourage and make possible individual teachers' professional development efforts after the passage of Proposition 2 1/2. According to the Danville Foundation's Annual Report (1996), over the last ten years, more than half a million dollars have been raised and awarded to recipients to further their professional growth. These projects would most likely not have happened had it not been for the Foundation.

Danville's eight elementary schools are a kindergarten to eighth grade system. These eight schools are located in various sections of town, each with a long standing history associated with socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Four schools make up the upper echelon and four are considered to serve more of a diverse community

of affluence, working class, and those living in public housing. Though these perceptions appear to have shifted over the years, some members of the community are quick to inform those who ask of the town's history, its continued distinctions of certain sections of Danville (Freshman Campus Field notes, 1997). There are wealthy areas of the town and parts with more concentrated numbers of some ethnic or racial group. Not unlike Royalston's neighborhood distinctions, Danville also has certain areas identified as more troublesome or problem prone, than others (Danville Police Report, 1996). Yet, outside the town, the one image that prevails is that of the upscale, affluent urban/suburban, racially, and ethnically diverse community .

The schools also reflect the community. For instance, the Truman school district has a large number of synagogues and Jewish bakeries and kosher stores in a square mile radius. While the Kennedy, Lincoln and Madison school districts have large numbers of town employees who live in those areas, many of whom are of Irish descent. They were characterized as the "townies' schools" in the early 70s and 80s (Danville High School alumnae reports, 1994). The Buchanan, Roosevelt and Humphrey schools are located in the areas of town with the wealthier homes. The high school is centrally located, though it is farthest from the Buchanan and Humphrey Schools (Danville Town Records, 1984).

When these students arrive at the one large Danville High School with these broad distinctions, a difficult transition takes place (Danville Middle Grades Report, 1996). Although, the orientation programs have improved over the last two years, the transition was still an area in need of improvement, particularly in light of the creation of this new campus (Freshman Campus Field notes, 1996). An examination of the existing programs for ninth graders will be reviewed next. The Parent

Teacher Organization (PTO) and the Danville Educators Association (DEA) are organizations which provided structure to the two groups, parents and teachers, and from which members worked together to co-sponsor segments of the ninth grade orientation programs. These two groups play an active role in the school's culture (Lightfoot, 1983). The sense of community is not easily passed on to first year students. Lightfoot describes it as more of a relationship that develops over time rather than because of a single event.

### Research Participants

A sample group of teachers from this ninth grade campus were interviewed. The sample of participants was taken from the eighty-four professional staff members, across the disciplines, both full and part-time. They had one or two years experience at the campus and must also have had at least three prior years of experience working with ninth graders. With this criteria, sixty were eligible to participate. A representative sample of fifteen staff members were selected for interviews by the process described below. Ultimately ten were available for interviews. Each interviewee signed a consent form in which they agreed to participate in this study. They agreed to review transcriptions of the interview for accuracy and were given a brief abstract of the study. The consent form also promised confidentiality in reporting findings and results.

Interview questions were open-ended and allowed for individual identification of the salient features of the campus. The interview questions were established to determine the teachers' perceptions of the key factors in promoting student success, and/or negatively impacting student success, both academic and social, in the ninth grade. Each interviewee was asked to share evidence that would specifically

illustrate each of these salient features.

### Participant Selection Process

Lincoln & Guba (1985) argue that the selection of participants takes into account the two primary criteria of participant selection: sufficiency and saturation of information. Bertaux (1981) suggest a "snowballing" approach to the selection process, one participant leads to another and then another. These researchers were looking to determine an ideal number of participants for qualitative research.

To best gather the data from key individuals, the present study used purposeful sampling. Patton's (1989) discussion of purposeful sampling techniques is very thoughtful. Three primary criteria ranges were determined for participant selection in this study. The first criteria range was the number of years in the profession. Since this ninth grade campus was a two year project, participants must have had at least three years prior experience working with ninth graders in a nine through twelve high school setting. This allowed for a comparison to be made in their working with ninth graders in that setting versus the separate ninth grade facility. Preference was given, whenever possible, to those who had five years or more experience prior to working at the ninth grade campus. Nonprofessional status educators (teachers who have not been in the Danville Public Schools for three or more years) were not eligible to participate because they have less than three years experience as educators in this district. Sixty staff were eligible to participate because of their years of experience.

The second criteria range in determining selection was the amount of time spent working at this two year ninth grade campus. There were four tiers of preference, full time for two years, part time for two years, full time for one year,



and part time for one year. Of the sixty eligible, thirty-four work part time at the campus. Of the thirty-four part timers, twelve spent one year at the campus. They were in the lowest preference tier in the selection process. Twenty-two part timers spent two years at the campus and they were placed in the second tier. The third tier of preference was given to those who were full time for one year. Four were eligible in this tier. Those who were full time and had worked at the ninth grade campus for the full two years were given the highest priority and placed in the first tier of preference. Fifteen were eligible in this first tier.

The third criteria range was the representation by departments. There were fourteen department categories from which the participants could be selected. The list below indicates how many staff were eligible to participate in the study by department once satisfying first two criteria.

1. Social Studies-1
2. English- 4
3. Math-2
4. Science-2
5. Special Education-1
6. Foreign Language-2
7. ESL-2
8. Performing Arts-1
9. Career/Technology-2
10. Visual Arts-1
11. Physical Education/Health-1
12. Guidance-2
13. Support staff-3
14. Administration-2

There were a total of twenty-six eligible participants. These twenty-six had three or more years of teaching in Danville prior to the opening of the ninth grade facility; had full time status at the facility and spent both years there. Of these twenty-six, fifteen were initially available for interviews. Subsequently, ten interviews were

conducted due to personal life changes and relocations for five. One interview was completed as a pilot study. This interview was done immediately after the ninth grade campus ended its two year run. Three additional interviews were completed at that time. The remaining six interviews were conducted four years later.

A case study analysis was also conducted by gathering data on the creation of the campus with special attention paid to the teachers from this urban/suburban school district. The field notes recorded the pre planning stage as well as the events and activities during the life of the campus. The district is comprised of a mixed population of affluence, low socioeconomic background, second language families, transient populations, professional families studying at area universities and hospitals and generations of families who have always lived in the town (DPS, 1999).

### Data Collection

The planning and implementation for the creation of this ninth grade campus began six months prior to its opening. The data about this process was collected as part of this participant-observer's role as principal. The "dream team" of teachers, counselors and administrators, who elected to work at the campus, met over the six months for planning and continued to meet during the life of the project. These documents represent much of the field notes of this project. They were taken during two summer planning workshops, special faculty meetings, collaborative sessions with parents and with other high school teachers not part of the planning team, and a survey was conducted of students who were to enter as ninth graders (see Appendix). Some of these notes were reported here in this section and in the appendix. They informed this participant-observer and added to the authenticity of

the observations as they were part of a multi instrument approach as described by Peltó and Peltó (1978). Their book on the structure of inquiry and the work of researcher as participant-observer emphasizes fieldwork as the fundamental approach. As anthropologists, they focused more attention on the participant-observer whereas Wolcott (1980) elaborates upon their work and further posits that there are two primary strategies in fieldwork: participant-observation and interviewing. Wolcott sees the delicate balance between participant and observer depending greatly on the context and in schools there are constraints on how insider or outsider is to participate. Wolcott (1978) advocates for more active participants in ethnographic studies in schools. His belief is that more is gained when the researcher is an active- participant. This researcher for the present study was an active-participant.

### Interviewing

Siedman (1991) argues that interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand their behavior. He further states that a basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience. Researchers investigating educational organizations, institutions or processes through the experience of those in the setting have the primary access to this organization, institute or process (Siedman, 1991).

Wolcott (1988) discusses the "key informant" as the primary holder of the information that is sought in interviewing. The term informant has special meaning in this context. It refers to an individual in whom one invests a disproportionate

amount of time because that individual appears to be particularly well informed, articulate, approachable or available. Casagrande (1960) argues that ethnographers rely more heavily on these key-informants than their accounts imply. Wolcott (1984) cautions against reliance upon a single source or to his "ethnography minus one theory". Here, Wolcott serves notice that in school related studies it is often the researcher who is telling what everything means rather than permitting those in the school to give their vision of their world.

Interview questions for the present study were open-ended and allowed for individual identification of the salient features of the campus which the teachers saw as key factors in promoting student success, and/or negatively impacting student success, both academically and socially. Each interviewee was asked to share evidence that would specifically illustrate each of these salient features. Siedman (1991) cautions the researcher who also supervises those to be interviewed. He does not recommend this but notes that valuable information can still be gained.

At the conclusion of the two year project, one interview of one of the teachers was conducted and used as a pilot study. The interview was taped and transcribed. The themes from this transcription provided the basis for refreshing the memory of those interviews conducted four years later. The pilot study helped to confirm that the interview questions allowed teachers to share their perception of the transition to high school and the elements which create successful transitions. The single transcription further confirmed that the questions addressed the topic of transition in such a way as to allow the teachers to identify the essential features for a smooth transition. Three additional participants were interviewed at the end of the two years, just after the first class who entered the ninth grade facility graduated from Danville High School. These interviews were also transcribed and added to the researchers' premise that the

teachers' reactions to the separate facility would inform the planning for transitional programs for the district. The remaining six were interviewed three years later when the researcher was able to complete the data gathering for this study. It was interesting to review the transcriptions within the various time differences. The findings also examined these time differences to see if responses varied according to when the interviews were conducted.

### Research Procedures

Interview questions were to ascertain the salient features of the campus which might ease the transition to high school from the teachers' perspective. The questions included the following components: (a) demographic data including number of years as an educator, discipline area and prior experience with ninth graders in a 9-12 high school or in a separate campus; (b) an open-ended format which allows for individual identification of those salient features of the campus which might ease the transition to high school from the staff perspective, i.e., activities which promote student success, and/or negatively impact student success, both academically and socially . Secondly, staff were asked to identify those features of the campus which they believe contribute to the professional development of those working with ninth graders. (see Appendix for complete interview questions) Each interviewee was asked to share evidence that would specifically illustrate any of the salient features they identified.

Prior to each interview, a cover letter from the researcher explained the purposes of the study and included an informed consent document for each participant to complete. The cover letter also included the process of assigning code numbers to the transcribed interviews in order to protect each participant's identity. The researcher had the code number assigned to each transcribed interview.

In an effort to increase reliability of the data, all interviews were transcribed to ensure accuracy as well as to preserve the words of the participants. The researcher conducted an analysis using the Hyper Research computer software. Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed and each participant reviewed the transcription for accuracy. They were able to add or delete information for complete accuracy and clarification purposes. This provided the triangulation of the data which enabled the researcher to identify connections and common themes amongst the experiences of the individual teachers.

#### Data Analysis

The credibility of the present study is dependent upon the following factors: the sample must represent the target population; the participants must have knowledge or information needed to respond to the questions, must understand and interpret the questions as intended and should be honest in their responses; these responses must be recorded, interpreted and accurately transcribed (Jaeger, 1988). Once each interview was completed and transcribed and corrected for accuracy by the participant, the transcription was analyzed using Catherine Kohl Riessman's Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research Methods Series 30, as a guide for interpreting the data.

Coding of the significant themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews began after each transcription was completed. The themes were then categorized as follows: subject teacher, years of teaching, and years of teaching in urban/suburban high school or middle school. The pilot study helped identify themes from the subsequent interviews and helped the researcher to further identify and categorize the themes that emerged.

### Summary of the Methodology

The primary methodology for this qualitative study was an active participant-observer collecting field notes and interviewing the teachers of this two year ninth grade campus. The qualitative approach included a multi-disciplinary inquiry with a focus on the ethnographic case study method. The full reporting of this two year ninth grade facility as a case study utilized the transcriptions of the teacher interviews, the field notes from pre opening planning meetings, staff meetings, workshops, special events and activities. All of the data that was collected provided the basis for this study's analysis and addressed the primary research question: Do teachers' believe that a separate facility for ninth graders make for a smooth transition to high school? Chapter Four presents the findings for this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The transition from eighth to ninth grade is an important time in preparing students for success in high school. In this chapter, teachers' reactions to a separate facility for ninth graders revealed their identification of the salient features for a successful ninth grade program. In addition, this chapter will discuss the other data collected as field notes during the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the life of the separate ninth grade setting in this study. A summary of the essential qualities of ninth grade transition programs is also included in this chapter. This summary was created from the sample of programs reviewed from an internet search.

The research on the transition to high school overwhelmingly supports a program that addresses both students and parents (Mizelle, 1997). The collaboration of the sending and receiving schools in developing this program is also a key element for student success (Mac Iver, 1990). This study is primarily focused on the teachers' perspectives in identifying the essential variables for a successful transition to high school. This discussion also includes reference to the field notes to further support the findings. A summary of the essential characteristics for effective transitional eighth to ninth grade programs was determined from the interviews of the study participants, the field notes, the researcher's observations, and from the review of the sample of ninth grade programs, concludes this chapter.

The premise of this study is that ninth grade teachers and ninth grade students build close working relationships when housed in a smaller school setting designated for ninth graders only. These closer working relationships provide the



basis for the academic and social/emotional support that ninth graders require (Mizelle, 1996). The main purpose of the present study is to determine the perspectives of a sample of ninth grade teachers who worked at a separate ninth grade campus. The gathering of qualitative data through individual interviews of a sample of ten teachers, across disciplines with many having more than twenty-five years of teaching, helped determine if they saw the separate setting as a way to build closer working relationships with ninth graders. There were two research questions, one focused specifically on the teachers' point of view on the effectiveness of a ninth grade only campus as a setting for a smooth transition to high school. The other research question sought to identify the salient features of separate ninth grade programs as determined by a combination of study participants' interview response, field notes, the researcher's observation and a review of the sample of ninth grade programs.

The researcher used an observational case study approach. Ten teachers were invited to participate in this study and were interviewed for approximately one hour each by the researcher who formerly worked as principal of the two year ninth grade campus. The transcripts of the interviews were supplied to the participants to check for accuracy. The interview questions asked participants to select a number from 1 to 4 to quantify their answer. A response of 1 represented least beneficial or helpful and a response of 4 represented most beneficial or helpful. Responses of 2 or 3 offered a less strong response but a leaning toward less beneficial or more beneficial, respectively. The researcher was seeking to eliminate any middle ground response (see questionnaire in Appendix A). The research questions were addressed according to the themes that emerged from the interviews. The participants' ratings of 3 or 4 in a particular area were determined to be indicators of strong support as a

factor in the transition to high school. Those areas receiving the greatest number of 3s or 4s were clustered together and categorized. These categories helped to organize the primary findings. These primary findings lay the foundation for determining the salient features that make for a smooth transition to high school. The significant themes that emerged from the participants' perspectives and the researcher's observations also helped to identify the salient features of successful ninth grade programs and the effect of school size on teaching and learning. A review of a sample of ninth grade programs from across the United States also helped in the identification of the important elements for a smooth transition to high school (See Table: Features of Sample Ninth Grade Programs). The themes from this study fall into the following categories: relationships, school size, student activities, staff development, common practices and parent involvement. A review of the limitations of a separate facility for ninth graders, as identified by the participants, is also discussed.

The sample of teachers represented the five academic discipline areas, English (two were interviewed), math, history, science and foreign language. In addition, the following areas were also represented: physical education, guidance, administration, and special education. The only areas not represented were visual and performing arts and career technology. The ten participants had a combined total of 253 years in education. The least experienced teacher had 8 years of teaching and the most experienced teacher had 35 years of teaching. Eight of the ten had 24 or more years in the field. Four out of the eight had spent their entire career at Danville High. All participants elected or were expected to teach at the ninth grade campus because of the structure of the high school. For instance, in the case of the guidance counselor and the administrator, it was their turn to work with freshman during one of the two years of the program. Prior to the ninth grade campus, all participants had been

working at Danville High for four or more years. In fact, eight out of the ten had been there for seventeen years or more before the creation of the ninth grade campus (see Appendix D. for more characteristics from the Participants' Background Grid).

J. Allen Queen (2002) offers one of the most comprehensive studies of the transition to high school. He identifies twelve factors contributing to successful transitions between middle and high school. Throughout this study, the interviews with the teachers and the research of the sample ninth grade programs across the country revealed the same variables that appear in Queen's work. Most specifically, the following five of Queen's critical factors in the transition to high school were supported by the participants in this study:

- 1.) The larger the high school, the greater the negative impact of transition on ninth grade students;
- 2.) Ninth grade students' adjustments to high school are complicated by their perceptions of a bigger school, different environment, changed class schedule and smaller classes;
- 3.) Fear of getting lost in the high school building is by far the number one fear of ninth grade students;
- 4.) Ninth grade students must have at least one adult in their lives for genuine support in order to become academically and socially successful;
- 5.) High school drop out rates are higher for middle school students than for students attending K-8 schools. (Queens, 2002, p. xii-xiii)

The significance of the findings provided by this study lies within the overwhelming number of references made to the building of relationships as a factor in creating a smooth transition to high school. According to the findings of this study, Queen's twelve factors can be impacted if the one area of relationship, be it between student and teacher, student and student, teacher and teacher, middle school and high school, district office and schools, school and home, and school and

community, is built and sustained amongst all affected parties. Number four of Queen's twelve factors [Ninth grade students must have at least one adult in their lives for genuine support in order to become academically and socially successful] is most directly connected to the findings from the interviews as it was the single variable most often referred to amongst all the participants as the key element to success in ninth grade.

Mac Iver (1990) supports this premise when he also posits that positive school climates must ensure that every student is well known by at least one adult in the school. He further suggests that school staff personalize the school experience for each student by making efforts to know students by name and regularly provide encouraging comments as they pass in the halls. Eccles, et al (1991) stress that the goal is to have students feel connected to their school thereby increasing their motivation to attend, do well academically, and contribute beyond the classroom. The findings in this study reinforced this thinking.

### Research Questions

1. Do teachers' believe that a separate facility for ninth graders helps to ease the transition to high school?

### Relationships

All the participants in this study gave a ranking of 4 (most beneficial) in response to questions which related to relationship building, be it student/teacher, student/student, teacher/teacher, administrator/teacher, middle school/high

school, district office/schools, home/school, and/or school/community. The importance of relationships and the ease with which they were established at the Freshman Campus (FC) were indicated in all participant responses.

**Participant #1-** Well anytime I had a problem with a student, its the proximity of your office [principal], two classrooms away was helpful. But I felt either through e-mail or through face to face contact that I never had to leave school without having had my problem addressed. And its almost always the case that the problem gets resolved with a conference or I know that you or J. [assistant principal] had met with the student that was a problem.

**Participant #2 -** I think it [having 9th graders in a separate setting] was easy because you could focus on what their needs would be. So you could focus, okay, they're all ninth graders. They augment from this type of experience. This is what they need, both academically, socially, psychologically, and the conversation could all be focused around a particular class and what their needs would be.

**Participant #3 -** We were like one big happy family, dysfunctional at times, but you know, just a family. It was a family atmosphere. And the fact the kids would still come back and call for me, you know, its just a connection that was made. They knew where to find you. They knew where you were. They knew, like the first group, after they left, they were coming back that second year. They weren't suppose to, but they were coming back to find these people that they had a bond with, who they knew cared about them which created problems because they weren't supposed to be there, but these were good problems.

**Participant #4 -** I mean, it was community building. You know, the people who were there ... my teaching is not average and normal, by any ways. I tend

to be voyeuristic. I know a huge amount of information about all of my kids. I have very intrusive questionnaires and I tell them things about me, the more the kids want to know, but there's a sharing event. So, they all knew my family. They've seen all the pictures and so on. At the Freshman Campus, that was much more the norm than anywhere else ... that the teachers and the kids knew each other much better. There was a much more sharing of ideas that allowed you ... I mean, the buzzword in education changes every so often, but there was more feeling there of dealing with the whole child than at any place I've ever been in any circumstance in education.

**Participant #5** - I knew almost every student there and all of the staff ... it was cross disciplinary. The staff room here ... the high school, you have a staff room for English, social studies and math. At the Freshman Campus, everyone was in the same room. Every staff person from every different discipline was in the same staff room and were able to compare experiences with kids and find out what worked and what didn't work...I thought that faculty meetings that we had were very beneficial. Of course there were some concerns about students, and I think that in those meetings, everyone knew who those students were, so with everyone knowing that, we were able to keep a close watch on those students. It was really like a village. Everyone, all of the teachers had an idea of the students that were having problems and issues and they were able to look out after them and give feedback to administrators at the Freshman Campus regarding the students.

**Participant #6** - Seeing students before, during and after school was similar to the experience with older students. The major difference at the FC was that I knew them all by name and many were not students that I taught. They were friends of the students in my class who would come after school with their buddy. I knew more students after those two years than I have ever known in such a short period of time. The relationships were built at the FC

and continued once we were all back together. I believe those two classes really benefited from the time spent just learning how to be high school students.

**Participant # 7** - Because, it's so hard for me to put into ... it's so obvious that it's hard for me to put into words. It's ... I saw it so clearly. I wasn't as aware of it when I was there. It's when I came back to the high school and saw how those kids related to one another in this building when they were sophomores, juniors and seniors that those two classes that were at Freshman Campus had a closeness, a caring about each other, not just knowing your small group or some of the kids in your class, but you really knew, by sight, every single, solitary kid in your class and you knew at least two thirds of them by name. That's unheard of in a school whose size is just less than 2,000 kids. But you're talking about around 500 kids per graduating class.

**Participant # 8** - It was clearly the greatest benefit, making connections between students and teachers was so much easier because even the students knew we were all in this together. They probably didn't realize it until we were all back together at the main campus. I think the adults of course knew immediately that the relationships were easier to establish with just one group of students to worry about. Ninth graders are the neediest too.

**Participant #9** - Well I think because you were able to really establish relationships with kids early on and so that enabled you to help instill confidence in them because you were so readily able to connect to them.

**Participant #10** - Yeah, I think because of the level of trust in all in terms of the relationships that were developed in that environment were lasting. It was an entry point for high school and so there was an element of trust and support from day 1, that, in fact, I think that it developed a confidence level within the kids that someone was there for them no matter what and that

there was always time for them.

The overwhelming consensus of all participants was that the relationships that were built, particularly between student and teacher, were the most important in helping ninth graders not only have a successful first year of high school but also support them through the remaining high school years.

In establishing schools which meet the range of student needs, Sergiovanni (1994) writes that building a sense of community requires all stake holders to be invested. Field note observations and interviews of the participants in this study clearly point out that all stake holders, teachers, administrators, students, and parents had a role in the development of the FC experience. From the pre opening planning stages to the final arrangements for reentry to the main campus, these stake holders reported a sense of commitment for it to succeed and a sense of community to make that possible.

This sense of community promoted a culture of students and teachers speaking about caring for one another. Field notes revealed students' input on the kind of student activities, clubs and events they wanted to participate in during their ninth grade year at FC (see Student Interest and Volunteer Surveys, Appendix B). These surveys were used to help identify specific activities and assign students to these activities. The volunteer survey was a way to involve students in the logistical needs and begin the relationship building between teachers and students. They included activities like, working with staff in planning opening day; serving on a committee working with the principal to represent student opinions; decorating/painting the school; offering computer skills; serving on the student orientation committee; serving as a building guide; serving as a teacher's aide



(helping before school starts); serving as an office aide or science lab assistant. This list gave students opportunities to play a small role or a large one in various areas. The ultimate goal was providing that opportunity to connect teachers and students, build a sense of community and engage all students in meaningful activities beyond the classroom (Field notes, Summer workshop planning for FC, August, 1997).

Findings in this category of relationships support Queen (2002), Meir (1996), Hertzog & Morgan (1997), and Mizelle (1997). They report that ninth graders because of their developmental stage thrive when they have positive relationships with peers and adults from school and home. The participants in this study repeatedly brought up the small size of the ninth grade campus as a critical feature for creating these positive relationships.

### School Size

Participants identified smaller school size as a benefit to supporting ninth graders as they transitioned to the demands of high school. Again, participants responded with a rating of 3 or 4 (most beneficial) as to the advantage of a separate facility for ninth graders. According to all the participants, the smallness increased their knowledge of the students, and enhanced their ability to connect more easily with them and other staff members. The setting of small schools encourages teachers to innovate, and motivates students to participate, resulting in greater community for both groups (Wells, 1996). Meir (1996) also touts the positive attributes of small schools. She sees them more easily meeting student needs because the students are readily known to staff. This stance is supported by the findings in this study. Participants gave high ratings for the variables which they believed were factors of school size. They included class cohesiveness and sense of

safety, better communication among staff, knowledge of students and easier access to them, leading to a perception that fewer students were 'falling through the cracks'. Nine out of the ten participants felt more students were prepared for the remaining high school years, and commented that it was easier for students to know staff and find them within the building, and easier for parents to navigate the building because it was a less intimidating setting than the large main campus high school.

**Participant #2** - I think the small size was most beneficial for boys because of as prepubescent boys they would never have the kind of relationships they had with the girls if they had to compete with older boys. And so for them, I think it's probably done tremendous things for their self esteem. And for girls I think it's a healthy environment to get to know boys their own age and not be worrying about making impressions on the older boys. So that's the positive for the kids' social lives.

**Participant #3** - You knew where everybody was, and it wasn't like you had to go walk a mile to go find someone in a different building, and then they're not there. You know, you had accountability, better accountability from the faculty on down to the students. People did what they were supposed to do, which made them accessible. Students' movements were more easily controlled and contained and, like I said, attendance wasn't an issue. And I think that had something to do with the smaller setting. I mean both attendance to school and attendance to class. I remember my first semester there, I got confronted by my coordinator, who got confronted by an administrator as to why there were so many good grades being given when, the previous year, there were more D's and F's in the ninth grade Health/PE classes. And attendance was a large part of that, because a lot of our classes are based on attendance and participation and having the kids there. I mean, I could teach them CPR and make them learn it because it was just us present.

**Participant #4** - I think, at the high school, the larger setting, there's a lot of intimidation within different groups. I mean, God knows there was hazing no matter how much we tried to ignore it, or think we've prevented it. Kids are always a step ahead of us. There were kids who were frightened of seniors and what they heard, particularly within certain groups. You know, the football team, the METCO program, and other groups where it was almost traditional, and therefore it was accepted and expected. They knew they wouldn't have to deal with that and at the main high school, there was a whole series of things about, "Oh my god, those kids are going to throw me in the locker the first day of school because that's what happened to my brother."

I thought it was easier to share materials too. There were, ya know, if there was somebody across the hall, in a different department doing something, and I would walk by and say, "What are they watching?" I use something like that, and, ya know, in the high school, sometimes, they're three floors away and the other side of the building is a long way. I wouldn't bump into things, by accident, the way I could at FC. I miss that too.

**Participant #5** - The class cohesiveness was strong, simply because you have anywhere from, I think it was probably between 300 and 400 students and they're all in one building, and they're all taking part in various activities, assemblies there in school and because it's not overwhelming. The setting is so small, that students usually had the opportunity to get to know one another.

**Participant #7** - You may have 200 adults in this building [main campus] but I don't think students have the idea that many of us are easily accessible. The smallness helps and the ... yeah, the small number, in a sense, of teachers and you always knew where they were [at FC]. It wasn't that they could be lost somewhere like in the quadrangle building at main campus. They could be found easily and there was a common teacher space, so you didn't have to

look in 50 different locations. If somebody said, "The teacher's at her mailbox", there was one mailbox. I have 4 mailboxes now. Ya know, I mean, that's just, to me, a symbol of the difference in size. Everyone was more accessible, more on top of each and every one of the kids. I think kids came out of there really well prepared.

**Participant #6** - Students were more readily identified for extra support because we were in a smaller setting and the focus was only on those 9th graders. Staff collaborated frequently to try to meet student needs. Its the most collaboration I've ever experienced working with very talented colleagues. We had a common purpose and we worked as a well oiled machine because we were small enough to connect regularly.

**Participant #10** - I also think coming from a smaller elementary school into an environment that was smaller than the main campus, there was a sense of safety in all. All of that was important and so you had eight different groups from the elementary school coming into the one facility for just them. And so that, in and of itself, made for a smaller transition into high school. Its much better to come to a school of 400 students compared to 1900 students. It gave many of them a chance to come into their own without worrying about older students.

The lone dissenter to the benefits of the small setting was **Participant #8**. He felt more that the smallness was an illusion. He said:

The smallness of the setting reduced some of the sense of anonymity, but we were really a large group in a too small facility. While some students thrived in the crowded environment, others withdrew into themselves. Many students had to wait until tenth grade to grasp the difference between elementary and high school.

### Student Activities

Common values and articulated goals are hallmarks of schools that work together (Sergiovanni, 1994). Schools with fewer students are able to achieve this more readily. There is more opportunity to take part in school governance allowing students to take a more proactive role in their learning. In a Parade Magazine article (9/19/99) high school seniors were surveyed. They listed tips for entering freshman. Among them was this: "Get involved in after school activities. They make it easier to get up in the morning." Schmidt (1993) purports that there is a direct correlation between students who have success gaining acceptance socially in a new school environment. They experienced smoother transition than those who do not. A student's sense of belonging and connectedness to their school also contributes to their success or failure in the transition (Queen, 2002). The findings in this study directly tie teachers' sense of connection with students and their connection with each other to students' overall sense of comfort and safety at the FC. Eight of the ten participants rated questions related to student activity as favorable (3 or 4). The importance of the activities was reflected in the number offered to students. The field notes revealed that teachers were willing to serve as advisors for extra curricular activities when they had never done that before (Field notes, planning meeting, 8/97).

The sense of responsibility is a strong requirement in developing successful high school students. Students must learn that responsible behavior comes from people making rational choices and decisions and accepting the consequences of their actions (Lamme, et al. 1992). Berman (1997) believes that since responsibility is learned through experiences, students must be given greater responsibility in order to develop into more responsible, socially effective individuals. The participants of

this study concur but differ in whether a separate facility enhances or hampers their development as responsible high school students. Student involvement in extra curricular activities for ninth graders only was seen as beneficial but limiting for some students.

**Participant #8** - I question whether freshman only activities were that beneficial at the FC. Some students preferred to focus on individual academic studies and were not willing participants in activities. They could have used older students who were good, strong academically, and active in extra curricular things, as role models.

The overwhelming consensus from the participant ratings and comments were that activities for freshmen were a positive for them.

**Participant #1** - But overall in the scale of things, I think the healthier relationships happen, and being able to interact with your peers in an activity or while on a sports team is more positive, I don't buy that role model argument [of the older students] as much as some other people. I think a lot of people touted that as the reason our kids in January are still acting like babies because they don't have the older kids as role models. I don't fully believe that.

The maturity level of ninth graders was debated extensively in terms of whether the FC structure aided their maturing or enabled their immaturity to flourish. A couple of participants felt the absence of older students was a deterrent to their behaving more responsibly or more maturely. Others, such as Participant #1, felt that the older kids played no significant role in the timing of ninth graders' maturity. This researcher observed both positive and negative interactions between older students and

ninth graders and sees the influence of positive older students as important but not significantly more so than the influence of other peers.

**Participant #3** - I think some of the kids, because after school activities took place at the high school, a lot of the kids still got that positive connection with older students and that's where a lot of the positive influence from older students comes from, whether it's team mates, or drama, band mates, or in the play. So a lot of kids still were able to get that positive role model experience ...maybe, not a lot of them, but still some did.

**Participant #6** - Freshmen only activities were great for my kids. They probably would not have joined as many clubs or activities if they had to compete with the older students. I do understand some staff's concerns about their having a false sense of their abilities but they're only ninth graders, its good for their overall self-esteem.

The comments expressed by Participant #6 were most representative of the other comments about the positive impact of the freshman only activities. It is important to note that the FC structure mandated participation in freshman only activities during the X block time, an activity period once a week during the school day. One of the benefits of this structure was the ability to take risks as described below.

**Participant #7**- The fact that they had an activity block and that they *had* to participate for some kids ...Well, there were kids who still talked about that senior year. Like, for example, ya know, the only example I can use is the activity I did that kids who normally not in a million years would have gone to GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] had. We had such an interesting mix of kids and it was for some their first taste of any kind of political activism. You know, and I think that that happens with the Black Awareness Group. I think there were a number of really successful X block activities. The

smallness and the cutting off from the main campus, I think, for many kids, it was just what they needed.

The remaining participants agreed that any disadvantages to freshman only activities were far outweighed by the benefits. Students seem to fare better overall, according to the majority of the participants, when they were involved in an activity outside the classroom. **Participant #2** had this reflection about freshman only activities:

The activities during X block not only forced students to choose but many staff felt compelled to offer some kind of club or activity to give students a range of things to choose from. I mean, we had teachers offering guitar lessons, knitting and a comic book club, remember? That was so unusual because typically teachers had this period of the day as a prep period. Yet, the students were so eager to join some of these activities it made those who didn't offer something wish they had. It was a real bonding experience for some of the kids and those teachers. This paid off in the classroom when students worked harder so as not to disappoint the teacher, who happen to teach them guitar as well.

Participant #10 related this to his own experience of transitioning into high school.

**Participant #10** - I don't think we had any formal transition between the 8th grade and the 9th grade. I think the thing that probably helped me most is that we would audition for the high school band in junior high school, and that was sort of an entry point because it was then we began practicing with the senior band at the high school, that summer before we entered ninth grade. I think a lot of things came into play there. My band teacher was exceptionally helpful. I knew a lot of the kids that were in high school as a result of participating in athletic activities throughout the city. My mother and father were teachers, and as a result of that, I knew some of the teachers



who were at the school. I think being a part of the extracurricular activities was very much the key element for me that many years ago and for many students today. We [high school staff] always tell the kids to find an interest, look for your niche so the whole experience of high school is meaningful on many levels.

Participant #9 also captured the feelings expressed by the majority of participants about ninth graders participating in extra curricular activities:

**Participant #9** - If they can come in and and get involved in an activity immediately, it helps them make friends. It helps them become acquainted with an adult [coach/activity advisor] in the building, but as a team or club member, it also has the potential of having them meet older students. All of this serves to lessen the anonymous feeling that comes with a large high school. Students need the recognition, and some aren't able to earn it in the classroom.

Other participants identified the advantage of being involved in student activities in learning how to manage time. Three participants spoke of positive correlation between active students and students who did well academically.

**Participant #2** - I find that students who join sports teams, theater arts and clubs, etc. are better prepared for class. They know they have play practice or soccer practice and they won't get home until late in the day and so their time is more limited after school for just hanging around. These students have to learn to plan their time to get their work done. They seem to be happier, generally and the activities motivate them to come to school. Like many teenagers they just really want to be with their friends and what better way than in some fun activity. I think they're just better students academically and more fully developing individuals because of their participation in activities.

**Participant #6** - Students want to do well academically but with my students having a history of struggle makes high school even more of a challenge for some. If they were on the football team or in the play or some other school sponsored activity that held grades as the criteria for continued participation, many of my kids worked hard to make the grade.

**Participant #7** - So that [knowing what students were involved in extra curricular activities] was a way to keep the students more on target because more staff were easily talking to each other. It helped students to better manage their time because they knew they had practice or rehearsal after school so that had to figure out when they would do their homework. It makes them more accountable and therefore more responsible.

There was also a connection made by **Participant #4** which served as an example of the greater perspective that teachers have about students that comes from their knowledge of them as students in other arenas such as dance. He says:

I was talking with the woman who is now head of the Performing Arts Department, when she taught strictly dance, about a particular girl we had in common. And she made me realize that the girl expresses herself exactly the same way in dance as she does in her essays, that the same sense of purpose and forcefulness in structure and organization were obvious in both mediums and it was stunning. I gained a greater appreciation for this student's abilities that may not have happened had it not been for this conversation. In fact, this information may never have been shared between us in the large high school. It just was one of those happenstance conversations that occurred while having lunch at FC.

He also goes on to point out the benefits of supporting students in their extra curricular activities:

I say this sometimes, the busier kids do better and they learn how to budget their time better. There's less down time, which tends to multiply, up to a

point. As an educator, there would be meetings where I would go to where, when there was the least hint of trouble, the parents' knee-jerk reaction would be, "Well then, stop playing football. Stop being in the drama club, and so on." And very often, that's the worst thing that can happen. We tried to convince the parent not to take those activities away because usually the absence of them don't solve the problem.

### Professional Development

Peterson (1992) describes learning communities as educational environments where competition is downplayed and cooperative learning techniques and peer collaborations are the norm. The participants in this study repeatedly discussed the small setting served to make communication easier and enhanced the collaborative opportunities, formal and informal. Curriculum connections across disciplines and multiple instructional strategies were discussed as a by products of the FC experience (Field notes from Lessons Learned workshop, 1999). They were not areas that the teachers planned to change or revise. The science department did rearrange their course offerings during the first year of the FC. That teacher (**Participant #8**) spoke of the difficulty of that course sequence change from a ninth grade Oceanography science class to Physics. He offered this perspective:

Since we [science teachers] had to pilot the new physics course for ninth graders, the problems were sometimes hard to discern. Were the difficulties due to flaws in the curriculum format, the limited facilities or the fact that we had to share equipment between three different teachers and rooms? It did make us collaborate more often, and adjust our lessons as it became apparent certain space limitations or equipment issues would not support some of the initial lesson plans. I had a strong commitment to this change so I really

worked hard, we all did, to work out the kinks. The second year was much better. I think students liked the course and we had a better sense of how to make it accessible to the full range of student abilities. I first thought it was crazy to do this as we were starting the FC but now in hindsight, I think it worked better for the students even if we had more work to do. We'd have that anyway as a new pilot course. Students just dove right in and though some were timid about the idea of taking physics, many did better than they thought. The hands on aspect prove to be the best part for many.

### Common Practices: Defining the School Culture

The large degree to which staff collaboration occurred was a feature repeatedly discussed by all the participants. They reported feeling invested in a project that was meaningful, and where their opinions mattered. This is expressed by **Participant #4**:

In the large high school, there are things that go on that teachers ignore and walk by [inappropriate student behavior in hallways]. But at the FC, because there were a few of us and we knew each other, we depended on each other. I knew I could count on other teachers not to pass by something that I think should be addressed. We really implemented common practices because we created what they should be. There was more buy in over that aspect of FC than any other. I attribute that to the sense of team that was fostered amongst the staff led by the administration of FC.

I was more aware of how we can support each other professionally than I would have been. The good news is that the peers that were available in the building, were much more willing to share and the chance to have an occasion to sit and really talk about practice because we knew some of the same kids and because things were successful or were not successful in my class, and the other teacher would find it true in his or her class as well, and it may have multiplied. I became a better teacher in a lot of ways. And I think, frankly, it happened for some other people who were much more restrained

at the high school.

Other participants commented on the difference between how they worked together with ninth graders at the large high school and how they worked together at FC.

**Participant #2** - Just to find support was so much easier, easier to talk to colleagues, the ability, for example, for me to work with people in the English department, talking to science teachers, so I knew, in depth, what was in the physics program. I also had a very good sense of what the math was, so you always had a sense of where people were at, what things they were covering and then you can talk about kids as well, but always knowing the academics, what they say they're doing in math and science was a big help. It even helps you as you're planning your own work in social studies. We tried to make connections in our curriculum to other discipline areas. It would have been near impossible for me to do that at the large high school. We're just too spread out.

**Participant #6** - I think there was much less frustration here [amongst staff] because the common practices [see Appendix G] that we hacked out over a long time were fluid. We kept changing them if we saw the need. They were more easily kept to than they are in the larger building. That we were on the same page more often, that you were less likely to deviate because you were part of it, that all contributed to a feeling that we created these common practices and we would be in control of the success or failure of them. I tend to go my own way a lot. I think my kids need different structures sometimes. If you don't have rules I like, I impose my own and nothing beyond that. That was more easily discovered here and it was not something I wanted to do to my peers because there was more devotion here. Plus my kids didn't need anything different than what we had established as a staff. Again, the collaboration was key.

**Participant #10** - Working as a team across disciplines and for problem

solving was essential and happened frequently. Anytime you can have an involvement where teachers are constantly engaged and talking about strategies, that's important. It supports the growth and development of children academically and socially. And cognitively they also thrive. When you can get social studies and English teachers collaborating, it strengthens the learning experience for students, particularly ninth graders because they are so easily distracted and need to see the connections between the subjects they study. We were able to make those connections more often at FC than at any time prior. I've watched a lot of ninth graders struggle, over my years as a teacher, and this program gave them explicit direction on how to be a successful student. This happened mainly, because teachers worked together to make it happen. There was a common mission more easily articulated and implemented because there was a buy in on everyone's part, staff's part especially. There was a sense of sharing responsibilities there from the faculty that, I think, exceeded what existed in the main campus.

**Participant #9** - There was a degree of respect and trust amongst faculty at FC. The kids saw that and as we modeled behaviors that we wanted them to apply, we became better educators. We felt good about our work and I think the students who were there felt loved and cared for. And then I think because faculty felt so good about the experience, they extended themselves in ways that, in fact, they may not have in the larger setting. Faculty took more risks and tried different strategies in classes that helped more students be better students.

The staff development factor as defined by increased collaboration between and amongst staff from different subject areas, was often referred to as one of the greatest benefits for those staff involved in the FC. Curriculum enhancements, teaming and collaborative efforts amongst the staff, made participants herald the opportunities to work together formally and informally. The small setting also

contributed to the ease of sharing information about students, curriculum and instructional strategies. It also helped in solidifying the bond many of the participants spoke about amongst the staff. Fullan (1992) and Elmore (1995) suggest that in order for schools to improve, they must learn to do a few things well. The participants in the Danville FC study expressed an appreciation for the few things done well in the collaborative way that they worked.

They clearly saw their collaborative efforts as critical factors in the success of this ninth grade program. Participant #10 made this observation:

I have been in the system a long time and I have never worked so hard and felt such rewards as I did in the years at FC. The collegiality and the sense of common purpose made the work with those young people more immediately rewarding. The students seem to better appreciate our efforts on their behalf and colleagues demonstrated more respect for each other by following through. It provided a glimpse into the kind of teaching and learning setting that works for all.

### Parent Involvement

The importance of parent involvement is a vital factor in the process of transitioning from eighth to ninth grade (Mizelle, 1997). Mizelle posits that schools and school districts rarely offer staff any formal training in collaborating with parents on how to make school more welcoming to them and safer for students. Wells (1998) contends that the school culture in middle schools is more open to parent involvement. The findings in this study reflect the K-8 school configuration and support this premise.

Danville Public School staff and parents describe the high school as a huge unmanageable labyrinth of people, classrooms and offices (Field notes, Summer Workshop, Planning for Year 2, 1998). The K-8 elementary schools are seen as

"warm fuzzy" comfort zones for parents to be as active as they want to be (Field notes, Planning for FC, 1997). As the planning began for the FC, parents were involved from the seventh and eighth grade pool of parents. They had a vested interest in the success of the campus and saw their involvement as a natural extension of how they had been involved as elementary school parents (Field notes, 1997). Parent involvement was recognized by the Danville school district as critical to the ninth grade program's success (Field notes, Planning for Freshman Campus, 1997).

The most extensive involvement of the parent body was during the planning stages for the FC. Parent representatives sat on the FC Planning Committee that began meeting six months prior to the opening of the campus. There were also parents who participated in the summer workshops prior to the opening that first and second year (Field notes, 1999). Prior to the opening of the FC, ninth grade parent participation was mostly centered around their orchestration of the orientation day for ninth graders, the day before all students were to report to high school. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) served as the primary vehicle for parent participation at the high school level. This involvement centered around fundraising events and rarely ventured into program development (Field notes, 1997). Their input was solicited by the high school staff and many of them wanted to play an active role in the creation of the FC. Two participants in the study affirmed the positive role that parents played during the planning period.

**Participant #2** - I was amazed as to how many parents participated in the planning prior to our opening the FC, especially that first group. It was good that they were involved but I wondered if these were the movers and shakers of the elementary parents and they expected to be involved. I was somewhat



suspicious that they were not trusting us but soon I saw how much they brought to the discussions. I was happy to have them on board. They did serve as ambassadors to other parents to allay any fears about what we were planning.

**Participant #6** - I think most parents always want a role in their teenagers' lives. I think we presented these parents with an ideal forum to weigh in on the planning of the FC and in evaluating it after that first year during the summer workshop. I felt the parents who participated were just as invested in the success as we were as a staff and this helped the students to prepare for the FC experience. They were like our harbinger of great things to come. I enjoyed working with them. I think it helped forge some good relationships before the doors of the campus even opened.

Paulsen (1994) reported that parent support is vital to school transition, particularly as students enter adolescence. Epstein (1991) further posits that parent involvement is critical in student readiness for school and for support as they move through the school organizations. Educators have studied the parents role in student success at every age and conclude that when parents play an active role students experience more school success (Comer, 1980). The findings of this study again support the research.

Participants spoke more about parents' involvement after the campus was up and running. Some acknowledged parent participation in the planning meetings or with developing curriculum issues in the Health class, but most often they referred to better parent communication as a factor in helping support students during the ninth grade year.

**Participant #3** - I think there was better communication with parents because you just had the freshmen there and you got to know who the parents were. They sponsored some of our staff breakfasts on Friday. I remember that the parents came in and wanted to help with the eating disorder curriculum that was added to our ninth grade Health course. Remember that was brought up by a parent at one of those breakfasts? Then we started meeting Friday mornings with that small group of parents who were psychologists. They were great to work with. And that was developed with those parents and that's still part of our curriculum. That relationship [parent/teacher] helped develop curriculum, and maintain currency in curriculum. That's never happened before or since.

**Participant #5** - I think the communication with parents was great. I think communication at the high school is good as well, but at the Freshman Campus, because it was a small environment, it felt more to the parents, I think, that we were more attentive to their child's needs because we just dealt with freshman. The majority of the teachers did communicate more, and as far as meetings, you have the majority of the teachers there for meetings with parents. I think they felt more connected to some of the teachers because some of the parents had been on the planning committee and so they had some prior contact that made our communication with them and from them better during the year. There was more trust, I think.

**Participant #4** - One of the things about going from the 8th to 9th grade is that it is much like taking your kid to kindergarten for the first day. One must feel, "Oh my god, I've lost control. I've given my baby to this other person." From 8th to 9th grade, that's coupled with, your child's about to become an adolescent who will never want to talk to you again. And at the high school, it's very hard for parents to be involved because kids say they don't want you there. At Freshman Campus, it was very different about telling parents that they were wanted. They could help. We needed their help and it was a

partnership. That's something the PTO is trying to do, but it's always a battle. We also spent more time, I think, in dealing with different language communities, and making sure that things were sent home so that everyone could understand them. We made more phone calls. I think the smaller numbers helped... and that's not something I like to do and not something I'm good at. For somebody who talks this much, I'd be easy to tell about. Somehow I knew the person at the other end of the phone would know who I was. No one was anonymous at Freshman Campus.

#### Limitations of a Separate Facility for Ninth Graders

Two participants, #8 and #9, were not sure the separation from older students was a great aspect of the ninth grade campus. In discussing the limitations of FC, they felt it gave the students a false sense of security about themselves as high school students.

**Participant #8** - Some students developed an inflated sense of importance while others remained in the elementary mode. We tried to find the balance between the elementary school model and the high school but too many students who were top dogs in 8th grade were able to take advantage of not being at the main campus. I think it was June when they realized they were part of a larger academic community.

**Participant #9** added this:

I remember thinking students would benefit by more contact with older students than what the FC could provide. I do think they would have tried harder to keep some of their immature behavior in check if the older students were around.

Other participants talked of the absence of the older students but most felt that other benefits outweighed any disadvantages in this area. This focus did have more

participants wondering if the ninth graders' immaturity would have been improved had there been more contact with older students. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) recommend freshman orientation programs include older students as mentors and guides. They see them as the links to supporting the social development that ninth graders have as a challenge. The positive connections with older students can lessen the hazing and bullying that also goes on in high schools (Queen, 2002). Mizelle (1997) posits that programs which promote positive peer relationships that begin in eighth grade and continue through ninth with social activities for younger and older students help with the transition to high school. The participants and the observations of the FC as documented in the field notes in this study also support this claim. Prior to the FC, activities such as the Junior Mentor program matched each volunteer student in their junior year with a small group of five or six ninth graders during the summer before the ninth graders arrive to the high school. They call and/or write them to introduce themselves, explain their role and answer any questions they might have before school starts. The first day of school for ninth graders is a time just for them to familiarize themselves with the building, finding their rooms, meeting their teachers and their junior mentor. The students continue through the first semester to serve as a buddy or mentor to their group of ninth graders (Field notes, 1997). This junior mentor connection seem to serve as a link between ninth graders and older students.

**Participant #1** speaks to the Junior Mentor program at FC:

The students who took their role seriously as junior mentors did a great job in helping the freshman feel connected to older students. I think they provided them with a big brother or sister who could protect them from the

more rambunctious upperclassmen. We had athletes, scholars, artists and your average Joe who stepped up to the plate to be a resource and a guide to our ninth graders. It may not have been as effective since they had minimal contact after that first day unless they connected in other activities, but it served many students well in case they had no other contact with upperclassmen. I think the program was more needed at the larger high school because the ninth graders were more vulnerable there.

Prior to the FC, transition programs involving students were in place starting in the eighth grade (see Appendix for complete list). They included programs like the Big Brother/Big Sister program. This program matched ninth graders new to the school system with older sophomores, juniors and seniors. Their role was similar to that of the junior mentors but the assignments were one to one and were made all year long as new students entered the school.

Most of the participants spoke of the relationships ninth graders forged with older students through sports, plays, community service activities and clubs. Mac Iver (1990) stresses the importance of opportunities for these groups to work together on common goals. These activities are seen as valuable team/community building experiences according to all participants in this study. Questions that focused on students' relationships with older students received ratings, 1 or 2 (see Chart of Participants' Ratings on Limitations of the Freshman Campus ).

**Chart of Participants' Ratings on Limitations of the Freshman Campus**

<b>What was a limitation of FC?</b>	<b>1-not limiting</b>	<b>2-somewhat limiting</b>	<b>3-limiting</b>	<b>4-very limiting</b>
Lack of older students	#2, #4, #5, #6, #10	#1, #3, #7	#8, #9	
Added another transition to high school	#2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #9, #10	#1, #8		
Prolonged immature behavior	#4, #5, #6, #10	#1, #2, #3, #7, #9	#8	
Facility conditions	#4, #5, #6, #7, #10	#1, #2, #3, #9		#8

As the above chart indicates, a second transition was identified by two participants as a limitation to the Freshman Campus. Field notes (1998) also reflected concern that the creation of this separate facility for ninth graders meant they would experience an additional transition from the Freshman Campus to the larger high school when they would move on as tenth graders. This limitation, however, received the least number of participants identifying it as somewhat limiting (2). The field notes (1998) reveal a Freshman Day at Main Campus schedule (see Appendix) with the purpose of giving the incoming tenth graders a chance to spend the day at the main campus after the senior class had graduated. The planning by the main campus and Freshman Campus staff demonstrated a collaboration to prepare the ninth graders for entry into the main campus and minimize concerns about this information.

**Participant #3** had this response which represented the majority viewpoint :

The fact that they got to know their class and who their classmates were and who the other freshmen were helped when they went to the larger high school. That was positive. I think once they left that close family environment, they kind of were like thrown out there on their own, so to speak, where they didn't get the attention that they got at Freshman Campus, so in some ways it was good that they got to know each other and developed the relationship with the staff. One of the guidance counselors and one of the administrators returned with the first group. The second group was probably easier because then we were all back there at the larger high school together and they could find us.

The maturation time frame of ninth graders and the condition of the facility were also identified as limitations to some degree. Participant #8 had the most concern about the facility conditions. As a science teacher he most often expressed his frustration with the limited lab equipment that had to be shared amongst the three science teachers. To add to this challenge was the fact they were piloting physics for ninth graders during the FC experience. This may account for his outlier responses.

**Participant #2** addressed the maturation concern, which represented the perspective of several others:

I think it was good for them to just be with freshman in activities, but I don't necessarily know whether ... I know we had long conversations about whether the presence of older students would have created a pool of greater maturity and so on. So it seems like, at first, the first couple of months of each year, you work with ... where they are. And I always felt that after the January break and you come back and it's very different. For those first couple of months you were really sort of working with that eighth grade energy. So,

the maturity comes, maybe the exposure to the older students in sports, clubs and other activities would make some ninth graders try to behave more maturely. It wouldn't be a bad thing.

Overall, from the study participants and from the observations documented through field notes, teachers believe a separate facility for ninth graders eases the transition to high school. We will now review findings for the second research question.

## Research Question Number Two

*2. What are the essential elements of a successful eighth to ninth grade transitional program?*

### Eight Essential Elements

In identifying the essential elements of a successful eighth to ninth grade transitional program, factors were considered from the interviews of the study participants, the observations represented in field notes and from the review of a sample of ninth grade programs.

Transitions were the focus of a three year study co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) with the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers and the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (Weldy, 1995). The following eight most essential elements were supported with specific evidence from these aforementioned sources. A more in-depth analysis of each follows.

1. Start transition events by the spring of the eighth grade year;
2. Provide opportunities for eighth graders and parents to visit the high school prior to official entry;
3. Establish collaboration between the staff of sending and receiving schools in order to share information about curriculum for both grades and to make explicit connections for ease of academic transition, as well as for



planning transition events;

4. Identify low performing students to ninth grade staff prior to entry and provide summer courses to build skills and become familiar with school;
5. Assign a core group of teachers and other school staff to work solely with ninth graders;
6. Involve older students to serve as mentors and participants in other structured activities;
7. Promote students' participation in extra curricular activities;
8. Separate ninth graders in a different building, wing or floor in high schools with over 800 students.

Factor 1 - Start in the spring of the eighth grade year.

The study participants, the field notes and the sample of ninth grade programs indicated that communicating early and often is an essential element in easing the anxiety and fear of the unknown for eighth grade students and parents. All participants agreed to the value of the early planning for the Freshman Campus. Their views also supported the work of other programs reviewed in this study. Mizelle (1997) posits that transition programs which share information with parents and students during the eighth grade year help ease the transition process.

**Participant #7** made this comment:

Now if we had made Freshman Campus a permanent thing, whether the parent involvement would have lessened, I don't know, but I mean parents were so hyper about everything, "Is this gonna be a disaster? Oh my God, they're not at the high school." Ya know, but they were very involved in the plans and they were there all year. And I mean that in a positive way. They helped form the culture and lessened their worries and their kid's worries in

the process. It wasn't like some of the stuff that goes on here day-to-day that drives me nuts with the parents, like the level of expectation being very high and the level of participation being non-existent. At Freshman Campus, they were there. They were part of it because they wanted it to work too.

An examination of the sample transition programs also indicated that the earlier in the eighth grade year that the transition events begin the smoother the transition (Queen, 2002). Field notes from planning (1997) revealed that the eighth grade principals and counselors of Danville Public Schools were concerned that the transition programs would begin too early in the year and the eighth graders would become too focused on the high school too soon. The staff feared this early focus would undermine the work the eighth grade staff still had to complete with them. The eighth grade staff reported that programs which begin in January of the eighth grade provide enough time to start the transition events for students and parents. As this had been past practice, and served all parties' needs, the Freshman Campus Planning Committee agreed to continue to plan for transition activities to start in January (see Appendix for Schedule of Transition Events).

At the conclusion of the FC experience, staff identified the elements that were transferable back to the larger high school (see Appendix for Lessons Learned From the Freshman Campus). Those included, among many others, continuing the practice of starting transition events for eighth graders and their parents in January of the eighth grade year (Field notes closing FC, 1999). The timing was key and from all concerned stakeholders January was a good time within the school year to begin to focus on the transition.

Factor 2 - Provide opportunities for eighth graders and parents to visit the high school prior to official entry.

This factor is attributed to the study participants responses to the importance of inviting students and parents to visit the high school for information sessions on the Freshman Campus and to become familiar with the restructured school setting. It also addresses the concerns raised by the parents in planning for the Freshman Campus (Field notes, Planning for FC, 1997). Finally, the prevalence of this factor in the transition programs reviewed for this study indicated communicating with students and parents.

Weldy (1997) highlights the benefit of both eighth grade students and their parents visiting the high school as often as possible. He argues that clarifying expectations and standards for students and parents are important first steps in strengthening the transition to high school. The field notes from this study show concerted efforts by the high school and the K-8 schools to work together to help the students and parents feel comfortable with the new idea of separating ninth graders as well as the setting. The K-8 elementary experience is seen as a positive factor in easing the transition, in general (Queen, 2002). Minimal grade transitions through K-12 schooling, such as a K-8 elementary school to a 9-12 high school is a more favorable condition for students to maximize learning between grades (Alspaugh, 1998). Mizelle (1999) argues drop out rates are higher for middle school students than students attending K-8 schools.

A study by Julia B. Smith in 1996 used a national sample of public school students to look at the effectiveness of middle school transition programs on high school retention and student performance. Results suggest that programs targeting a combination of students, parents and staff in assisting students to make this

transition have a measured impact, even after accounting for student demographics, family characteristics and student behavior. Smith found that the most positive influence on student retention and performance came from those programs in which students experienced a full transition program that targeted the combination of students, parents and school staff. For middle school students, including "high achieving" or "gifted," the transition to high school can be an unpleasant experience (Phelan, Yu & Davidson, 1994). Learning to negotiate the management of their time between meeting their school responsibilities and meeting their needs socially are seen as key elements of a transition program from eighth to ninth grade (Queen, 2002).

Dianna Lindsay, former co-chair of the Harvard University Principal's Center and principal of Worthington Kilbourne High School in Columbus, Ohio (1997) has outlined their transition program which best supported Factor 2. She describes the eighth to ninth grade transition as divided into three phases, Vitality, Interest and Meaning. In the Vitality phase, administrators work together to ensure a smooth transition is planned. Parents and their children first hear from the school principal in the fall of eighth grade year. Introductions of appropriate personnel (counselors, administrators, department heads) are made. Curricula offerings are discussed in detail with sample schedules for parents to review, along with emergency medical information, athletic and extra curricular activities and other opportunities. Social and behavioral expectations are clearly articulated. The school is open for a tour and school personnel are available for personal conferences. Parents receive a three ring binder which includes an agenda from the evening, necessary registration forms, school newsletters, timelines, due dates, curricular offerings. Both parents and students are given an opinion questionnaire to learn about the student from the

parent's perspective and learn from the students' perspective their hopes, fears and goals for high school. The feedback is useful for school personnel and helps determine the services to offer certain students.

In the Interest Phase of the transition, staff from the high school look over the data collected from parents and students and consult with middle school staff to determine best course placement and support services needed. If scheduling questions arise, parents are contacted. The relationship with parents is built prior to the student's arrival to the high school and sets a positive tone for an ongoing partnership. In late spring, students visit the high school and are assigned a junior student who serves as host. Eighth graders visit classes, meet student leaders of clubs and sports teams and have lunch with their junior host. The students then return to their schools, debrief the experience with their classroom teachers and write thank you notes to their junior hosts.

In the Meaning Phase, students have arrived for the first day of school when there are only freshmen in the building. A formal assembly provides students with the information and introductions needed to begin the school year. Rules and expectations are reviewed and students visit their classes before all the other students arrive. Seniors (the former junior hosts) escort the freshmen to their homerooms after a tour of the school. Homeroom teachers review the school handbook, the students' schedule, answer questions and help with lockers or other concerns. Lunch for the first day for freshman is a cookout and the whole day's activities are videotaped. The videotape is released at the parent/student evening assembly that night. Parents hear the same speakers as the students and are escorted about the building by their freshman. At the end of the first day, freshmen are asked

to evaluate the day and their input helps to shape the transition for the next year. Parental informal evaluation occurs at the September Open House. Parents complete a questionnaire about how their child is adjusting to high school. Feedback shows parents are more than pleased with each phase of the transitional program. Lindsay (1997) argues that vitality in planning, interest in the individual's concern about high school, and meaning in rituals is why the transitional program is effective.

The comments from a few of the study participants and the field notes supported the elements identified by Lindsay. Though many of the features implemented at Worthington Kilbourne High School were not part of the FC experience, the philosophy was very similar to FC, find ways to educate the whole child, communicate these plans and include all stake holders in a timely fashion (Field notes Planning for FC, 1997).

**Participant #6** - We really tried to include everyone's input as we planned the FC, and I think that made a difference in the experience for students and staff. The kids knew we had put a lot of work into trying to make it like the high school but different enough to respond to what they told us they wanted [in student surveys] and what their parents wanted. The educators knew what we wanted but not how best to make it happen. Some was trial and error but most times we hit it on the head with our plans for giving them Freshman Privileges [see Appendix for Freshman Privileges] like a modified version of open campus.

Participant #1 added this reflection::

It was not hard to work together as we planned for the opening of the FC. Many of us knew this was a rare opportunity though some felt looked at it as a challenge to be conquered. Either way, it was a meeting of the collective minds [parents and school staff] which help to determine the timing of the

events to welcome students and parents. Parents kept talking about the large high school as a mammoth structure to be tamed, The FC provided the vehicle for parents and staff to vent about the problems and look for solutions in creating the FC. Visiting the school became a mantra to overcoming the fears.

Factor 3 -Establish collaboration between the staff of sending and receiving schools in order to share information about curriculum for both grades and to make explicit connections for ease of academic transition, as well as for planning transition events.

Two study participants commented about this collaboration. The remaining participants were more focused on the collaboration amongst the ninth grade staff.

**Participant #8** made this statement:

With the change in the science sequence of courses starting the first year of FC, we had many department meetings with our eighth grade colleagues. They were not thrilled to now have to teach many of the units that were taught in oceanography which was the ninth grade science course. The seventh grade teachers had to incorporate physical science and other parts of the eighth grade science curriculum. So, this change at the high school had a ripple effect throughout the district. It made us meet early and often to anticipate the problems and work collaboratively to solve them. We never worked in the district that way t before. I think it made sense and after the initial crumbling, people worked hard to make it work.

**Participant #1** added this perspective:

The collaboration is getting better between the elementary and the high school. In a sense, they've come from 8 different places and they get eight different messages from their different schools, but they keep hearing the same message over and over again each day from the people who teach 9th grade. So the expectations in terms of homework, expectations of study habit

I think that's all very solid now. In the old days, we were so spread out and I know it will happen again next year when we return, it was hard to collaborate with other ninth grade teachers, forget collaborating with seventh and eighth grade English teachers. I'm only teaching two different courses to four sections. We talked a lot about this as English teachers, teaching four groups of kids the exact same age, you're so much more focused on what your teaching, what they're learning, the commonality of their experience. We can actually know what every single freshman has read because we know the six teachers teaching them this year and we know exactly which books they've used. Whereas in the old days you have no idea, it's just who you sit next to in the English department office and who you talk to, to know what the students not in your class are reading. Since the planning for FC, we continued to make the department spend more time collaborating between the eighth and ninth grades, its been a huge step in the right direction.

Observations recorded in field notes for planning FC (1997) indicated that the guidance counselors and principals or vice principals from the K-8 elementary schools were part of the planning for Freshman Camp along with ninth grade staff and parents.

Suggestions and revisions to the ninth grade program came after ninth graders offered their evaluation of the year, in addition to parents and other ninth grade staff.

Common Practices policy (see Appendix) was amended and reflected the lessons learned from the first year at Freshman Campus. Work between the ninth grade and the eighth grade staff has been primarily focused on the course selection process (Field notes, 1998). Parents are particularly connected to the staff of the elementary school as a majority have been in the school, working with the guidance counselors and principals since their child was in kindergarten. The summer workshop participants described a high level of trust between these groups generally



because of the number of years they have been connected to the school (Field notes, planning for 2nd year of FC, 1998). High school efforts to build trust with both students and parents were seen as a four year process (Field notes, planning for FC, 1997). Queen (2002) supports building trust in a list of "must dos" for entering ninth graders. He argues that ninth graders are so vulnerable educators can not afford to wait for the trust to unfold over the course of the four years of high school. He recommends collaboration between sending school staff and receiving school staff to organize information sharing and visits for students and parents during the spring, summer and first days of school. The timeline is important in helping to allay the fears that students have about difficult course work and possible bullying. Adhering to a time sensitive communication flow also addresses parent concerns. If they know what is expected, they can help prepare their ninth grader. He believes the trust factor increases when the information shared is implemented as outlined. Lounsbury (1995) further supports this thinking. He posits that the more adults aware of the needs and challenges, the better the chance to address them in a timely fashion.

**Participant #5** offered this observation which supports Queen and Lounsbury's position on building trust:

We had several working sessions during the planning stage, after the first year and at the end of the campus' run to work closely as a team. We examined past practices and offered real constructive criticism both from staff and parents' point of view. This only happened after trust had been established and a real bond had been created. It was clear that though we may have had different perspectives, we all wanted the campus to be a successful experience. We also wanted to take the lessons learned back to the main campus but that was harder to accomplish. But the trust of the staff and parents helped us in our work with the students.

Factor 4 - Identify low performing students to ninth grade staff prior to entry and provide summer courses for them to build skills and become familiar with the school.

Students moving from eighth to ninth grade are excited by the increase in freedom and in the number of choices they have in high school. Along with this anticipation comes anxieties about teasing by older students, making lower grades and getting lost in the big high school (Queen, 2002). Students who view themselves as not good students are even more at risk for failing in high school. Owings and Peng (1992) argue that the dropout rate is 25% or higher for ninth graders because of these and other factors. The transition becomes another stressful experience for these students who are already a high risk for failing. Mizelle (1997) contends that transition programs which address the needs of this population of students, not only better prepares them for the ninth grade, but helps the other students as well. Students want to know, as soon as possible, the routines and the expectations of high school. Low performing students are even more anxious about high school (Lounsbury, 1999). Central to fostering academic success and appropriate social development are school climates in which all students have a sense of belonging and are welcomed by staff and older students (Mizelle, 1997).

The transition program in the East Hartford, Connecticut Public Schools (1999) outlines the importance of identifying low performing students before they enter high school. Their Freshman Transition Program provides resources and supports by adults and older students to tutor in the summer and during the school year. They also have opportunities to participate in social activities with older students in the high school during the summer. These opportunities promote positive relationships that are often tied to sports programs, student government, clubs and other student

sponsored events. (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). The program is seen as successful since its drop out rate has decreased since its implementation.

The field notes in planning for FC (1997) document the communication between the eighth grade staff and the ninth grade staff. The long-standing practice before the Freshman Campus opened was to have the eighth grade guidance counselors send profiles of "at-risk" students, those who were failing academically for a variety of reasons and were at risk for engaging in destructive behaviors like drugs and violence, to the high school counselors. In addition, the list included students who were "stars" or leaders who were strong academically and active in extra curricular activities. These lists were shared with homeroom teachers of the incoming ninth graders. The ninth grade counselors also used the list to immediately reach out to these students. The low performing students were required to attend a summer school course which reviewed basic skills and provided an early orientation to the high school building. This practice was seen as a great start to high school for these students. The high performing students and athletes were contacted late in the summer by coaches for the fall sports. They had a chance also to become familiar with the school buildings and with some of the adults they would work with throughout their high school career.

The biggest complaint about the list of students from the eighth grade counselors was that the "average" student, not seen as at risk or as a star, but one who plugs along and is not a behavior problem, is the anonymous majority at Danville High. Several of the participants in this study referred to this perception that the student "in the middle" falls through the cracks. They were unanimous in their feeling that the Freshman Campus minimized, if not totally eliminated, this sense of "average hell".

This is how **Participant #5** described the benefit of FC in this regard:

My personal feeling is that when students enter as freshmen, I think it's very important for them to connect with someone, and because the Freshman Campus was so small and the teachers there knew every student, I felt, was connected with some staff member there just based on feedback that was generated on a particular student. So the smaller environment made it easier for teachers to form good relationships with the kids. Not just the kids on the "to watch" list either. That was the beauty of it, the setting was small enough so all the kids, the ones parents worry about no one knowing their child, could be watched. They may not all have a close relationship with an adult but more ninth graders were connected to adults than at the bigger campus. That perception is still one we combat now that FC is over. After the first six months of that first year, no parent made that complaint.

**Participant #10** articulated what he felt was the end result of the FC:

I think that it was easy to get around, easy to find people, easy to monitor the children. We didn't have any trouble at all with attendance or the kids cutting class, or kids leaving the school grounds. Those are some non issues, and yet and still we didn't have locked doors either. That tells you the kind of community that was developed in that setting. That, in fact, if the students enjoyed the degree of freedom that they had and they were very responsible about it, they were able to practice being high school students without the additional pressures from older students. They were more free to be true to themselves. They trusted the adults to keep them safe and so they took appropriate risks too.

Factor 5 - Assign a core group of teachers and other school staff to work solely with ninth graders.

Throughout the study, participants and field notes referred to the benefits of a cadre of high school staff working solely with ninth graders. The sample of ninth grade transition programs also highlight the importance of a specific set of teachers, counselors and administrators responsible for ninth graders. Prior to their arrival to high school, eighth grade staff work with ninth grade staff to determine transition event dates (see Appendix for Transition Program Before FC), share information on incoming ninth graders, and any new and/or pertinent information about the sending and receiving schools that would assist in the transition process (Field notes planning for 2nd Year at FC, 1998). The notes also included references to the creation of the "dream team" of teachers, counselors and administrators to plan and implement the Freshman Campus program. This team's work before, during and at the end of the program, were seen as critical factors in the success of the Freshman Campus and in the preparations for staff to return to the main campus. It also played a pivotal role in the preparation for a new group of incoming ninth graders who would enter the high school with all grades. This new group of ninth graders would benefit from the lessons learned at Freshman Campus (see Appendix for Lessons Learned from Freshman Campus).

All the participants in the study expressed support for a special ninth grade team of teachers, counselors and administrators. They each discussed the advantages of the ninth grade staff working closely together without distractions of teaching other courses with older students.

**Participant #4** offered this observation:

It made it much, much easier, and some of us did corny things there because we knew it was going to be a freshman experience. And I will admit that I stole as many ideas as I could from people who were very good at that. For example, I always have a list of kids that were going to be in my classes the previous spring, and over the summer I wrote them a postcard ... because a few of the teachers had done that and talked about how much easier it made it. So I talked to the parents and more teachers were willing to do that sort of thing. They knew it was special and administrators promoted that sort of tone. The team of teachers wanted to make that connection happen. It's a heartening thing if we can send them up to the "big building". And it looked like a prison to them. Coming in here, the rooms were decorated differently [than the main campus rooms]. Teachers came in early [before the school year began] to make rooms look nice because they were vested in it. I never went back early. My wife, who's an elementary school teacher, came in and put up three poster boards. I've never done that kind of thing before, but it was a different atmosphere and different environment, and we wanted to make it very different. We made decisions like that as a team of educators planning together. It was great. And it worked for the kids. They knew we had made special efforts to welcome them to this new place, not yet defined.

**Participant #7** also expressed her feeling of better communication with her department chair since she was located in the separate building with ninth graders:

I felt like there was real effort made by numbers of people, particularly department chairs, from this building [main campus] to come over to FC. Ya know, for regular contact, and sometimes, it was easier to talk with them when they came over than if you were actually in the building with them because they weren't in their office. There weren't 50 other people talking to them. Ya know, so I didn't feel the isolation I felt from this building. It wasn't really isolation, it was a welcome break.

**Participant #6** spoke highly of the effectiveness of a freshman only administration:

I think it was a clear case of prompt administrative support with the associate dean and principal easily accessible to teachers and students. The office was centrally located in the school and the teachers' room was right there. We had a birds eye view of the usual suspects and the amount of times we'd see that office door swing open for the teachers and parents. I don't think it would have worked if the administrators had to also be responsible for any other grade, not with 400 to 500 ninth graders, even 200 is too many. Our teacher to student ratio was about 20 to 1. That made the homeroom teacher role doable but definitely more effective with the administrators only focusing on the needs of ninth graders and their teachers. The support was consistent and on target, for students and teachers.

Again, this sense that no student would "fall through the cracks" with a team of staff working closely together is repeated in the literature and in the sample of transition programs. Lounsbury (1992) promotes the creation of interdisciplinary teams similar to those established in many middle schools. This approach seeks to eliminate the isolation of teachers by providing a working group of colleagues in which to conduct activities, to discuss relevant issues, and to solve mutual problems. Mac Iver and Epstein (1991) furthers that instruction is more effective in schools that use interdisciplinary teaming because of the increased integration that coordination across subjects, and because teachers on teams who share the same group of students will be able to respond more quickly, personally, and consistently to the needs of the individuals. They also stress remedial instruction in the form of extra coaching or additional practice time.

Incoming Wheaton High School freshmen in Silver Springs, Maryland, are assigned to a house of 80-100 students. The house system randomly assigns students to teams of teachers in a set of rooms specifically reserved for freshman located on the third floor in a designated part of the building. Teacher-student ratio is 1:20 with an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that uses real world projects and problems. Teachers serve as educational advisors and mentors in an advisor/advisee program. The program operates on a modified block schedule with frequent contact with parents. The benefits of the program have been determined to be increased academic achievement, reduced discrepancies in the achievement gap that plague poorer children and, too often, children of color, and stronger student-teacher relationships (Wheaton High School web site, 2003).

Factor 6 - Involve older students to serve as mentors and participants in other structured activities.

Hertzog and Morgan argue that transition programs which include activities that will provide incoming ninth graders social support opportunities with older students help to develop positive relationships between the two peer groups. Of all the sample transition programs and ninth grade academies examined for this study, all plans for incoming ninth graders included a role for older students. The aforementioned Wheaton High School program (web site, 2003) includes junior and senior students as does the transition program at Worthington Kilbourne High School in Columbus, Ohio (1997). The participants at Freshman Campus also spoke to the need for supervised involvement of older students with ninth graders such as sports, clubs, community service projects and orientation programs.



Participants #8 and 9 spoke most about the need for ninth graders to interact with older students. Other participants recognized the importance and felt there was sufficient opportunities for the two groups to meet. It was clear that having older students as junior mentors or leaders in extra curricular activities or sports teams, aided the ninth graders in their social development. Danville High promotes positive peer interactions between older and younger students through a variety of structured events and activities. They range from community service projects working with younger children in the elementary schools to observing juniors and seniors in leadership positions on sports teams and extra curricular clubs.

#### Factor 7- Promote students' participation in extra curricular activities.

As part of the planning for the Freshman Campus (FC), eighth grade students were asked to complete an interest survey (see Appendix for Student Survey). The completed surveys were tallied and each year the FC offered activities that were of particular interest to five or more students (Field notes, 1998). This strategy sought to have all of the students engaged in some activity beyond the classroom. Staff supported this by serving as advisors, coaches and instructors for many of these after school options (Field notes, 1998). The number of teachers who served in this role appeared higher than in past years. The structure of the FC demanded that more teachers offer extra curricular opportunities during the X block time. Many of the after school programs paid a stipend whereas the X block offerings involved teachers meeting with students around a common interest or hobby. They were reimbursed for materials but not given a stipend since the activity happened during the school day. Yet, more teachers signed on with some activity than had been the case in

previous years before the FC.

**Participant #9** - Yeah, I look at it [student participation in extra curricular activities] in terms of the competence that they established in doing different things that then they felt like they could. They can compete with the older kids even if they aren't necessarily there. Some kids won't take the risk of putting themselves out there even in non-competitive activities. The homeroom teacher/advisor was more connected at FC and could help me also encourage students to do some kind of activity after school. Parents looked to us to help make that happen as well. The kids that are active do better in school overall. They learn to manage their time better. Having freshman performing arts courses and opportunities was a big plus. So for a dance and things that were just...freshman social events, freshman sports, all events for them, it worked. They loved it. They made friends, built their skills and their confidence.

**Participant #4** expressed this notion:

I mean I've always been an 'officianato' of teaching's not a few hours a day job, much to my wife's chagrin, but I think it's important to go to events and I'd like to see my kids in areas that they are involved in apart from in my classroom. Whether they're good or bad in my classroom, and sometimes I'll just go to the room and stand in the back and think that I'm doing it unobtrusively, and kids have so many ways to let you know that they've seen you if you go to a back. At Freshman Campus, teachers did that as a norm and kids knew they would do that, so there was, I think, a tremendously different affect.

**Factor 8 - Separate ninth graders in a different building, wing or floor in high schools with over 800 students.**

As much as this may not be a possibility due to limited facility space, this study revealed that isolating ninth graders from older students in large high schools more easily meets the needs of ninth graders. The sample transition programs and/or ninth grade academies that were examined for this study also promote a separate building, wing or floor for ninth graders. A sense of safety was identified most frequently by ninth graders as one of the benefits of a physical separation from older students in high school (Queen, 1999).

**Participant #4 -** There were things done at the Freshman Campus that were truly for freshmen, and it meant whether or not you bonded with people very quickly, when you walked down that hall every day, you would see kids you recognized who wouldn't know you. And there's a, I don't do the math very well, but a 75% chance of that happening much more often than there is when you have three other classes there. There are people who will smile at you that will make a whole kid's day differently than if it doesn't, like, happen to a person. And there are lots of poignancies, but I remember one of my favorite students, who happens to be a P student whose mother also teaches in the school system, Jessie, whose mother said, at the high school, my son's best friend for 9 years in the elementary school was Steven. And my son's very academic and Steven isn't, and they've gone through 4 years at the high school where they have never had a class together, they don't see each other unless they happened to be scheduled for the same lunch two days a week because everything seemed to be, at that point, ability groups and kids travel in packs from one class to another if they're of the same "ability". And to me, that seemed a tragedy. That is, even if you group by ability, that is unlikely to have happened in a place like this with the Freshman Campus. They could have at least seen each other more during the school day to maintain their friendship at Freshman Campus. I

think that's an important part of starting high school, making new friends, yes. But also, holding onto your old friends, too. I think kids worry about this part more than just about anything else, especially the fragile ones.

The absence of the FC was more directly felt once the staff returned to the large main campus. It was difficult to implement the same Common Practices with other colleagues and other grade levels. Yet, it was the need to focus on ninth graders that made the 9th grade campus a more desirable design not needed for the other grades. The ninth graders are seen as needing more.

**Participant #7** also added this perspective:

I wouldn't want to see other grades isolated. It's such an important transition year for ninth graders. That's why FC was so effective. And I think, looking at the whole advantage to small schools, I could see it being effective in a 9 through 12 model, but I wouldn't want just one grade of 10 through 12. It really is best with the most vulnerable group, the freshmen.

## **Conclusion**

An interpretation of the key points listed below will be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

- Positive adult relationships with ninth graders are essential for their success.
- School size makes a difference in how well school personnel meet the needs of ninth graders.
- Student activities play a pivotal role in ninth graders feeling connected to their school and offers opportunities to build positive relationships with older students.
- Staff development which allows teachers time to discuss students, curriculum and instruction helps ninth graders as well as teachers.

- Parent involvement with the transition to high school signals support for the student and the school.

The participants in this study overwhelmingly supported the experience at Danville High School's Freshman Campus. It was interesting to review the transcriptions according to the various times the interviews were conducted. After the findings were examined the participants' responses did not vary according to when the interviews were conducted. Regardless of when the interview took place, eight out of the ten participants overwhelmingly saw the benefit to separating ninth graders from older students. All supported the concept of having a cadre of teachers and administrators working solely with ninth grade. They believed students and teachers were able to build close working relationships. Teachers were also able to communicate more easily and effectively because of the smaller school size. In addition, the professional development opportunities both formal and informal were attractive features pointed out by the participants. Finally, they all perceived parent involvement as a critical element in easing the transition to high school. Queen (2002) posits that these are essential to a successful transition to high school. All of these points constitute the major findings of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This final chapter restates the research problem and reviews the methodology used in the study. Additional sections summarize the results of the study and discusses implications for policy and practice. The chapter ends with a review of the study's conclusions.

#### The Problem

The transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is a critical time in a young person's educational career. Ninth grade programs and separate buildings for ninth graders have grown over the last ten years in an effort to meet their distinct needs. Most of these programs have been created by school administrators, and others outside the school. Research in this area reveals very little documentation of the teachers' voices on the transition to high school. This researcher's goal was to add the teacher's perspective in identifying the salient features of effective ninth grade programs which make for a smooth transition to high school. More specifically, the researcher wanted to learn if teachers of only ninth graders believed that a separate facility for ninth graders eased the transition to high school.

An observational case study and qualitative methodology was used in this study. Ten faculty members were interviewed about their work at a ninth grade campus that existed for two years while the main high school was under renovation. The interviews helped determine their opinion about the transition to ninth grade. The researcher was interested in documenting the benefits of a separate facility for ninth graders from the teachers' point of view. In addition, the essential features of successful ninth grade programs were identified by looking at common characteristics from a sample of these

programs from across the United States, from the literature review, from the perspective of the study participants and from the researcher's observations. This case study covered a period of six months prior to the September opening of the campus, two years during the existence of the school and the last five years after the campus was closed. Interviews and an analysis made of those interviews constitute the bulk of the data collected on the teachers' perspective of this ninth grade campus.

The case study relied primarily on the interviews and the field notes which documented the researcher's observations, student surveys, staff meetings, special meetings, summer workshops and follow up gatherings after the campus closed. The researcher was principal of the campus during the two and one half years of the campus' planning and existence. She contacted the participants through e-mail and by phone to secure their participation in the study. Interviews were conducted at one of three places, the high school in which the study was focused, the home of three of the participants and at the present school of the researcher. To insure triangulation, interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were then reviewed and checked for accuracy by participants. Data was organized and coded by hand by the researcher.

### Discussion of Key Results

One key result of the study is that participants felt that a central element for student success in ninth grade was building positive working relationships with adults. The success and degree to which participants found each of the identified themes as helpful varied only somewhat. All but one participant strongly indicated that a separate facility for ninth graders was a way to ease the transition to high school. Overall, there was consistency in the participants' responses to the essential

features of a successful ninth grade program. The major findings of this study yielded the following and are discussed more fully in this chapter:

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

- A.) Positive adult relationships with ninth graders are essential for their success.
- B.) School size makes a difference in how well school personnel meet the needs of ninth graders and in how safe students feel.
- C.) Staff development which allows teachers time to discuss students, curriculum and instruction, helps ninth graders as well as teachers.
- D.) Student activities play a pivotal role in ninth graders' feeling connected to their school, and offers opportunities to build positive relationships with older students.
- E.) Parental involvement with the transition to high school signals support for the student and the school.

#### **A.) Positive Adult Relationships with Ninth Graders are Essential for Their Success**

Nel Nodding (1991) discusses the ethic of care as a primary need for adults and children. She posits that when students in schools know that the adults that are in charge care about them not only as students but also as individuals, they are better able to perform. Teachers and other adults in the school also need to demonstrate an ethic of caring. This essentially means that decisions and actions are driven by the impact it will have on the sense of well being individuals experience.

The participants in this study echo Noddings' premise. Teachers' ability to build positive relationships with students is based on a sense of care and trust (Field notes



from FC Summer Workshop, 1998). Wells' (1996) work centered on whether adults can achieve real connections with adolescents. He cites those researchers who have assumed detached participant observer roles when working with students. Others have explored the adult-adolescent relationships. Wax (1979) purports that building rapport with adolescents is a key element in developing trust and enhancing learning. Noddings (1995) and Bosworth (1995) add that students in classes with teachers where there is a sense of care and trust are more willing to take intellectual risks. This study revealed that the sense of care and trust was high between and amongst the students and staff, according to the majority of the study participants. This allowed for an easier time in building the positive relationships they had experienced. The staff also attributed this caring and trusting atmosphere to the closeness students seem to feel with one another. These close relationships amongst the peer group offered additional support as students made this transition to Danville High.

**Participant #6** had this comment which captured the sentiment of most of the others and addressed the issue of caring:

We had planned and prepared so well for the students that they knew we wanted them to have a successful experience. Many of the parents helped and many other staff, not coming to FC, were involved in creating a place of learning that specifically had ninth graders' needs in mind. You know, the social aspect was key for them so we provided that at appropriate times, the dances, the plays, the other music performances, sporting games and some of the fundraisers were all fun, and they were community building events. I remember one of my students talking about how scared he was to come to high school but he didn't feel scared after one week when he met all the other kids and the teachers. He said, "everyone seem to act like one big family. The teachers really care about you and want you to do well." I couldn't agree more.

**Participant #3** also had a similar comment:

We were like one big happy family, dysfunctional at times, but you know, just a family. It was a family atmosphere. And the fact the kids would still come back and call for me, you know, its just a connection that was made. They knew where to find you. They knew where you were. They knew, like the first group, after they left, they were coming back that second year. They weren't suppose to, but they were coming back to find these people that they had a bond with, who they knew cared about them, which created problems because they weren't supposed to be there, but these were good problems.

Findings in this category of relationships support Queen (2002), Meir (1996), Hertzog & Morgan (1997), and Mizelle (1997), as they report that ninth graders because of their developmental stage thrive when they have positive relationships with peers and adults from school and home. The participants in this study repeatedly brought up the small size of the ninth grade campus as a critical feature for creating these positive relationships.

The sample of ninth grade academies also support this major finding. All the programs reviewed highlight the importance of positive relationships between ninth graders and school staff. Huron High School in Port Huron, Michigan stresses the connection to adults for ninth graders as a key to preparation for success in high school (Huron High School web site, 2003). They connect 75 ninth graders to a team of teaching staff who follow them as they move from grade to grade during their high school career. This researcher also noted from observations that students were often meeting with teachers before and after school to review and prepare for their classes. This practice seem more prevalent during the life of the Freshman Campus. Students at Danville High often met with teachers after school for help in

various subjects, but the difference here was that more ninth graders stayed after school to get the help they needed. The ninth graders had easier access to their teachers, which helped to foster the positive relationships. Student surveys revealed a willingness to assist staff in preparing the building for the opening of the Freshman Campus so that relationships began to be built prior to the school's official opening.

**B.) School size makes a difference in how well school personnel meet the needs of ninth graders and in how safe students feel.**

The participants in this study repeatedly brought up the small size of the ninth grade campus as a critical feature for creating positive relationships between all parties. According to Alsbaugh (1998) in the transition to high school, relationships between teachers and students, and smaller school size are central factors, which contribute to students staying in school and having better attendance to school. These are two outcomes, which determine student success, not only in school but also in life. The findings from this study support this ascertain. As researcher and principal, my observations were more encompassing because the campus itself was a single three floor building with a gym and four classrooms in the basement. It was easier to monitor student behavior during passing time because they moved along two staircases in the middle of the building and the two at either end, along with the three corridors. Study participants made recurring reference to the close proximity of the principal's office to their classrooms. They saw this as a major advantage over the larger sprawling grounds and multiple buildings of the main campus. Teachers and other staff made similar references to the advantage of a smaller building as documented in staff meeting field notes. Participants also noted the campus smallness in helping staff to be more aware of the students who were struggling even if they

weren't students in their class. There was a sense that no student would "fall through the cracks".

**Participant #4** shared a memory which illustrated the notion of how the students allowed adults to take care of them in ways they would not have had they been mixed with the main campus.

... I mean, I don't even know if anybody else remembers this, maybe some people do, but ... like two days after Columbine, having a fire drill when all the kids were expected to go outside and there were kids who wouldn't go outside because that's what happened at Columbine. I mean, I don't know whose idea that was, but, ya know ... There were teachers who dealt with kids who were freaked out in ways that showed their vulnerability...I'm pretty sure the week after that we remembered the reason kids were all outside at Columbine was a fire drill. And we did it within a week of that. Nobody put it together except some kids who were sobbing. People were in the hall saying, "You have to go outside." And kids said, "I'm not going." That sort of thing, kids letting teachers comfort them in ways that they would not have done elsewhere was unusual. We were small enough for this kind of bonding to happen.

Students who were observed, as part of this researcher's study, appeared more relaxed and comfortable with their peer group. A phenomena noted during the first year of the Freshman Campus with that particular group of ninth graders was that this class was a very "huggy" group. It was a fad of sorts as boys hugged boys and girls hugged girls and boys and girls hugged each other. Friends greeted each other with a hug and parted company the same way, and this was during their five minute passing time between classes. The common practices that the staff agreed to, kept some of the usual horseplay and teasing during passing time to a minimum. Though there were reports of bullying, most complaints happened during the bus ride to school or home.

Participants expressed a sense of increased student safety during the school day because it was easier to monitor student behavior in the smaller school setting. Harp (1994) studied school size as a factor in school effectiveness. The sense of ownership that students experience in small schools contributes to student success. In schools too large, a sense of anonymity prevails. Sommers (1997) reports that students in large schools are less connected to their school, and anger, frustration and acts of violence result. She sees smaller school settings having a better sense of their students and are therefore better able to meet their needs. Barker and Gump (1964) see this as the single most important benefit to smaller school settings. The findings here echo these positions on school size. The field notes and nine out of ten of the participants saw the smaller Freshman Campus as a central variable in students' needs being met and in their increased sense of safety.

Meier (1996) posits that a smaller school size addresses the needs of a higher percentage of students across socioeconomic levels. The setting of small schools encourages teachers to innovate and motivates students to participate, resulting in greater community for both groups. Wells (1996) discusses this as the essential benefit of a smaller school setting. In Meier's work, more positive attitudes and greater satisfaction results in higher grades and test scores, improved attendance rates and lowered drop out rates. She identifies seven reasons as to why smaller schools of 300 to 400 students work best and most were supported by this researcher's observations and by the study participants' comments.:

1. Governance. Easier communications happen when all staff can meet around a common table.
2. Respect. Students and teachers form positive relationships as they get to know each other well.

3. **Simplicity.** Individualized instruction and care is easier with less bureaucracy.
4. **Safety.** Teachers can respond quickly to behavior that violates the community standards and strangers are easily identified for security purposes.
5. **Parent Involvement.** Alliances are more easily formed with parents when they believe teachers know and care about their child's progress.
6. **Accountability.** Bureaucratic data is not needed to determine how a student, teacher or school is doing. Everyone knows.
7. **Belonging.** Every student is part of a community or social group that contains an adult, not just the academic and athletic stars.

The findings of this study sustain all seven factors on Meier's list. All were seen to some degree as a benefit of the smallness of the Freshman Campus. Through observations, field notes and participant interviews, each factor was touched upon. With the issue of accountability, there were a couple of references about it. The smaller size was a factor in assessing how well students, teachers and the school in general, were doing without hard bureaucratic data. The perception became the reality. Within three months of the opening of the campus, field notes and observations revealed that the transition had been a successful one in terms of the planning, and that students and staff were learning and teaching as expected with better than expected results. Participant # 3 spoke to the reference made to her students' substantially improved grades. She pointed to better attendance as the single greatest factor in students' achievement in her class. The Danville administrator in charge of data collection reviewed grades and attendance for the ninth graders at the Freshman Campus. He is reported as questioning the improved grades and attendance of ninth graders in the physical education and health class. Participant #3 shared this information to highlight the positive impact of working within a smaller school setting. She was adamant that the connection made with the students made all the difference, and this connection was easier to make because it was a smaller school. She also saw students wanting to be in

school and reluctant to leave at the end of their time at Freshman Campus. Her comments contributed to these findings.

**C.) Staff development which allows teachers time to discuss students, curriculum, and instruction, helps ninth graders as well as teachers.**

Schon (1983) suggests that regular reflection by teachers is an effective method to improve their practice. Participants in this study spoke to the advantage of having time to reflect with colleagues about their practice and about students of concern, especially to determine how the curriculum and the instructional delivery could impact their learning. Teachers clearly saw opportunities where there was time for reflection as critical features for being able to meet student needs. Participant #1 and #3 both pointed to the ease with which teachers were able to learn from each other. Participant #4 and #6 specifically pointed out curriculum development and instructional strategies which helped them professionally and which they continue to use to this day because students respond well to it. Participants #9 and #10 raised the issue of confidence building in students, which according to them was a direct result of staff conferring with each other about students of concern.

Observations by this researcher also support these findings. Staff meetings often included a sharing of strategies in working with students at risk for failing two or more subjects. There was a community effort to support colleagues as well as students. Lounsbury and Clark (1990) examined eighth graders in the eighth grade setting. Teachers' relationships were enhanced with opportunities to work on interdisciplinary projects with colleagues and students. Teachers also reported interest in serving as advocates in advisory programs, which were more academically focused rather than a social/emotional focus. Observations in this study do not directly correlate with their findings but participants' comments do show a willingness to take risks with new or

modified curriculum and instruction ideas.

In a 1990 study of New York City schools done by the Rand Corporation, it was determined that students learn more when exposed to a more frugal curriculum. The findings show students learn more from a simpler, more centralized curricular. They proposed that fewer course offerings also foster a greater feeling of community.

Field notes from this study suggest that a core curriculum for Danville ninth graders enhances their success academically. Models of interdisciplinary and team taught courses, more prevalent in middle schools, offer more meaningful and long lasting impact on student learning. Though not widespread at the Freshman Campus, English and social studies teachers did team teach. This method also helped students to make the connection of their learning from subject area to subject area and from book learning to experiential learning. Observations from this model revealed some success but noted disappointment from one of the teachers as his course did not unfold as expected. There was less focus on one subject area and so two teachers decided to offer this course for only one year.

Field notes reflect the support for and encouragement of teachers to continue to examine curriculum initiatives that specifically addressed the needs of ninth graders. There was some discussion of how best to duplicate the learnings from the Freshman Campus experience. Danville administrators talked about how best to welcome back staff and incorporate for entering ninth graders the lessons learned from the Freshman Campus experience. There was a desire to try to duplicate the successful transition of Danville ninth graders. Participant #4 expressed particular disappointment in the lack of carry over from the lessons of the Freshman Campus. His comments were not isolated in that others also felt more that the common practices instituted at FC could have been implemented more effectively, if only with ninth grade. However, the attempt to make the common practice a widespread practice amongst all teachers for all



grades lead to resistance and breakdown of the spirit of the concept, according to Participant #4. Mac Iver (1990), like Epstein (1991), sees opportunities to build teacher to teacher relationships characterized in their research as models for teaming: grade level or cluster teams with common planning times with specialists, such as special education teachers, reading and math specialists, music, art and physical education teachers as well as other support staff, such as guidance counselors, social workers, and administrators. The degree to which the school professionals work as a team to meet the needs of the student population mirrors the degree to which the transition period negatively impacts student learning. Therefore, the more time school staff spend planning for the transition as a team, according to Mac Iver and Epstein, the more likely the impact on student learning is a positive one.

Chivers (1995) also looked at teacher teaming and its impact on school climate. He found that teachers working in teams at the middle school prepare students for high school and engage middle school students more in their studies. Teachers who are known to their students over the course of their sixth, seventh and eighth grade years, meet with more success in the middle school grades according to Mizelle (1995). This success then becomes more easily transferred to high school performance. Danville's school district does not have middle schools but K-8 elementary schools. This grade configuration is seen in the literature as more conducive to supporting students' academic success. Mizelle (1999) points to the loss of learning time during school transitions as a factor in the loss of achievement for some students. With fewer transitions from school to school, achievement is least impacted. Danville Public Schools are at an advantage with this grade structure.

The concept of establishing a core team of teachers to work solely with ninth graders was a variable maintained from Freshman Campus. However, there were far fewer teachers who only taught ninth graders. They were not able to meet and plan as

frequently and with the same ease as at FC (Field notes, 1999). Even so, all but one participant recounted their experience as members of the Freshman Campus staff as one of the best in their career due to the sense of community and the opportunity for professional growth.

**Participant #5** made this statement, which represented the view of most of those in the study:

I think it was more helpful in the sense that even though the Freshman Campus just consisted of freshmen, the teachers that taught there, they had the same philosophy, the same mentality as if they were there at the high school, so they really had a chance to experience what the expectations would be at the high school in a smaller setting, so it was kind of like a precursor to what you're gonna get in a more intimate environment.

I think the Freshman Campus reinforced my preconceived notions about freshmen being students that you really have to... you have to take them by the hand in the beginning because they're used to that from elementary school and then you have to slowly train them to be more responsible and be on their own. That's how I thought of freshmen before I went to the Freshman Campus, and having been there full time, teaching all of those classes, that really confirmed that they are like that. It's sometimes hard for them to change gears, and for some students, it wasn't a big deal at all. I think that was very beneficial. Having fewer preps was also helpful to me from the standpoint that I could really experiment with different ways of presenting the material. Students that, of course, in a class you have students that learn in various ways, allowed me to put together alternative ways of presenting materials and also assessing. I may have offered more. That's kind of like an informal staff development moment. I think I remember having a faculty meeting about protocol, how to deal with certain situations that could possibly arise. Because we were always there together, we could bounce ideas off of one another.

**Participant #2** added to this feeling of it being something between a high school

and a junior high:

Teaching at the Freshman Campus, it felt like a junior high school. Students have had different experiences with teachers in the elementary school and I think the whole approach that teachers have in the elementary schools is very nurturing, not to say that it's not nurturing in the high school, but I think there tends to be more hand holding. Students are allowed second, third, and fourth chances. You're really concerned ... there's really a strong focus on development and with high school, the high school perspective is more important. You care about the development, but it's about the production. What is the student able to produce? How can we help the student produce what we're looking for?

**Participant #9** shared his feelings about the best strategies for working with ninth graders:

Team player approach to problem solving? God, that's a must. That's a 4 because we had the staff room. We had the teachers' room, all disciplines there, and usually a student that was struggling in one class, struggled across the board. So as far as strategizing how to best accommodate, how to best serve the student, that was very much needed because everyone would consult. And also, when you have a situation where a student was doing extremely well in one class, but not doing well in other classes ...

An awareness of the student's developmental issues in 9th grade is so important because if it's a developmental issue that is hampering their progress, you may not be able to assess that student the same way as you're assessing his or her peers. Some students, you have to assess orally and because they may have issues with motor skills. They may not be able to write or vice versa.

**Participant #6** spoke about the connection she felt to her students and they to her as a result of their close working relationship. She also attributed her willingness to adhere to common practices as a result of the staff coming to an agreement about them

together:

I really missed the first group of students. We worked out the kinks of the program with them. But, I know they missed us as well since they'd come to FC to see me. They'd say it was because they were just hanging out together but most times that had a question about some assignment or were nervous about something happening in their lives and they wanted to reconnect with those who had helped through freshman year.

The overwhelming sense from the participants, from the field notes from meetings and workshops, and from this researcher's observations, lend themselves to report that the findings of this study point to the significant gains perceived by the teachers of their ongoing and informal professional development opportunities and their ability to meet the needs of ninth graders.

**D.) Student activities play a pivotal role in ninth graders feeling connected to their school and offers opportunities to build positive relationships with older students.**

Gregory (1992) discusses the importance of students feeling connected to their school, and the resulting impact. He states that they exhibit more school spirit, participate in school activities and report feeling good about being a student at their school. These good feelings were exhibited at the Freshman Campus by the student body as observed from this researcher and as reflected in the participants comments. That there was no option during the school day as to whether ninth graders joined an X block activity or not, also increased students' participation in many activities. This mandated time to join an activity helped the transition on several levels according to participants of the study. It increased the participation rate of students joining clubs during this time frame. The experience of meeting in clubs and other activities during

the school day also helped build skills that were more easily transferred when interacting with older students during extra curricular meetings.

Participant #8 who had the most concern about the isolation ninth graders experienced from positive interactions with older students, confirmed the work of Queen (2002), Morgan and Hertzog (1997) and Mizelle (1996). They each purport that students involved in school sponsored events like sports, theater, clubs and community service activities have better grades and more positive relationships with their peers. The team building aspect of working on a project, goal or in a sport lends itself to ninth graders meeting and interacting with older students. Participants #8 and #9 expressed concern about ninth graders limited contact with older students who could serve as positive role models.

**Participant #7** had this comment:

Okay. I do think it was easier for students to connect with adults. If we think it was easier for us to connect, don't you think students may have felt the same way that they could find their teachers, that they could connect with adults there easier? I think it works both ways. I would give that a 4 because they also connected easily with each other ... we had a dance over there for the kids. They were able to connect with adults and every Friday, staff would play basketball with the kids, so there were always moments wherein we were able to engage with kids from all different backgrounds. They took that same sense of confidence and some could compete with upperclassmen and not feel intimidated. They had more chances to work with older students through the junior mentor p[rogram too. That experience helped the freshman but I think it also helped the junior mentors to be more positive role models in general.

Phelan, Yu, & Davidson (1994) posits that ninth graders look forward to high school in order to have more freedom to choose classes, activities and friends.

However, Queen (2002) reveals that the incoming ninth grader expresses concerns of

being picked on by older students, having more difficult academic classes, making lower grades, and getting lost in an unfamiliar school setting. Mizelle (1999) describes their anxiety as leading to a very unpleasant transition if schools do not ease this process with well designed transition programs. The findings of this study confirm their positions on the required elements for ninth graders to feel comfortable and capable in high school. The observations of this researcher along with the field notes and the participant interviews point to the efforts made in creating a safe and supportive ninth grade transition to high school. The planning by the staff of the sending and receiving school with help from parents and input by eighth graders demonstrated that the desired outcomes were generally achieved. The students had opportunities to connect with their peers, and interact in a positive way with older students through supervised activities. Though no claim was made that there was no bullying or harassing, there were more active reports of these behaviors in off campus settings (Field notes, 1998). This more active reporting was seen as a step in the right direction to, if not eliminate, minimize their occurrence. This reporting was also seen as a victory of sorts from the staff's point of view in that some students no longer worried about being "snitches". They were more connected to the adults and trusted that they would appropriately handle the situation once informed.

**Participant #10** made this observation about student involvement:

I think that the children participated with the main campus for high school events just as much as they would have done if they were all together at one campus. They attended the football games. They attended the basketball games and pep rallies. There still was a social connection between those two.

I mean, even though they were at a different campus, I mean, many had siblings. The activities are an important part of being a high school student and I think they got the best of both worlds with two campuses. I mean, they had their classmates and they had older students to interact with at sporting

events, dances, play, and other club activities. The sense of belonging and safety increased with their having had more positive experiences as high school students.

The findings of this study reinforces the idea that an active student is better able to manage academics and be a contributing member to the school in some capacity. Freshman Campus also minimized the bullying and harassing incidents during the school day. Participants of the study report that students seem more willing to confide in the staff about situations that were unsafe or potentially problematic. This researcher in her role as principal also experienced more student reporting of bullying incidents. The field notes added to the documentation of the increase of student reporting of problems after school, and the decrease in the number of students and teachers reporting these incidents during the school day.

**E.) Parent involvement with the transition to high school signals support for the student and the school.**

Weldy (1995) and Hewins (1995) focuses on reaching out to parents through a variety of activities. Parents play a pivotal role in the transition process and that role is stressed in Mizelle (1995) work as well. The participants identified parents as an integral part of creating and sustaining the Freshman Campus. This researcher observed certain parents involved in the usual activities but noted that a more diverse group of parents served on the Freshman Campus Planning Committee. Findings from this study indicated that the activities which most often drew parents were those where a clearly defined role was outlined for them. The leadership of the parent group most often worked closely with the principal in identifying and implementing plans as part of the PTO and the planning committee.

The parent group was generally more diverse on the planning committee, two Asian American parents, a father and a mother whose first language was not English, an African American father, two openly gay moms and an Irish American mom from the public housing development. Most of the children of these parents and the other four, two Jewish mothers and two Jewish fathers, who served on the committee, had above average academic profiles (Field notes, 1999). This researcher believes that these parents were driven to participate to be sure their children did not lose academic ground in this new setting. Their involvement was not unlike the involvement of other parents but the unknown element of the Freshman Campus prompted their need to help formulate their ninth graders' experience. Parents of underachieving students or those in danger of failing or identified in their eighth grade year as at-risk for failing were not as involved. Generally, this group of parents have historically been more difficult to engage. However, these students need their parents' involvement most.

**Participant #6** expressed this sentiment about parents of underachieving students:

I guess, just to be more specific, students who are low achieving students... and the parents of those kids, we need them to help us out and become more involved. That would help make the transition better. I guess it really depends on why those parents are not coming in. If they're not coming in because a majority of the parents for that population of students, if it's because they're working, maybe something can be arranged so that something is made available to them on the weekend, if they don't work on the weekend, if a lot of them are working third shift, have something in the morning or the afternoon, and of course, food always works. People like to be fed.



In Catterall's 1998 study of resilience in at-risk students during the transition from middle school to high school, the top three factors students identified for why they dropped out of school by grade ten included the following: they didn't like school, they didn't like teachers and/or they were failing their classes. The next three factors were that they had to get a job, their friends had dropped out and/or they didn't feel safe at school. Catterall's results suggest that resilience, as indicated by improved attendance and academic performance, can develop in groups of students seen as at-risk for dropping out if the following four factors are considered in the creation of transition programs: the nature of school responsiveness to students, the level of student participation in school activities, school safety, and the nature of family support to students for success in school. This study further affirms Catterall's beliefs about the needs of at-risk students. Though the drop out rate was not researched for this study, this researcher's observations and twelve years of experience as a guidance counselor at Danville High, along with the field notes and the participants' comment work harder at the Freshman Campus. The positive influence of peers, the requirements to be active members of sports teams or other activities as well as teacher support before, during and after school made success more probable. The staff contacted the parents of these more vulnerable students and encouraged their efforts at home to close the loop of support. This was another example of creating a seamless web of support to prevent any ninth grader from slipping through the cracks (Field notes from Lessons Learned workshop, 1999).

The findings in this study reflect the benefit in a K-8 school configuration and supports this premise outlined by Mizelle (1999) that the least number of transitions in school the better students retain information. Danville Public School staff and parents describe the high school as a huge unmanageable labyrinth of people, classrooms and

offices (Field notes, 1998). The K-8 elementary schools are seen as “warm fuzzy” comfort zones for parents to be as active as they want to be (Field notes from Summer Planning Workshop, 1997). As the planning began for the FC, parents were involved from the seventh and eighth grade pool of parents. They had a vested interest in the success of the campus and saw their involvement as a natural extension of how they have been involved as elementary school parents (Field notes from Summer Planning Workshop, 1997).

Gatta, McCabe and Edgar (1997) report that the primary characteristic of the successful transitional program relies heavily on the level of adult support students receive from the middle school to high school. Differences were observed in studies where the number of transitions within a school district had an influence on the success of the program (Mizelle, 1995). Mizelle argues that the coordination of multiple transitions falls on the adults in both the sending and receiving schools. The transition programs that targets all three groups, staff, students and parents, increase the likelihood of a high level of adult support and smoother transition to high school (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). The three target groups of school staff, students and parents were actively a part of the planning for the transition to the Freshman Campus. Those parents most active also served as ambassadors to other parents in allaying any fears about the quality of the Freshman Campus.

Queen (2002) offers one of the most inclusive studies of this topic. He argues that effective and comprehensive transition programs help: build a sense of community; respond to the needs and concerns of students; and provide appropriate, multifaceted approaches in order to facilitate the transition process. He further postulates that there are many factors that contribute to either the success or failure of students in transition. He found students identified four primary categories contributed to the challenges of transition to high school: relationships with teachers, academic

difficulties, adjusting to the school environment and peer or social pressure. They also indicated that the family served as a strong source of support. Again, the additional resource of supportive adults, whether family or school staff, is noted in the work examined in the meta-analysis of transition programs examined by Queen. The premise held by Queen and others was confirmed in this study. Participants all made references to the importance of parent involvement for ninth graders' success.

**Participant #10** made this comment, which was reflected in others' statements:

I don't think the parents were any more involved in the 9th grade at Freshman Campus as they were at the main campus. Now I think at the initial start up of the program, parents were definitely more involved, or more parents were involved and the involvement was at the highest level as well because of the concerns that they had. So, by the 2nd year, they were like the typical 9th grade parent. Nervous, excited, confused, overwhelmed by the curriculum choices but not by the size of the building. I think that we were a former elementary school building made the setting less intimidating for some. The facility was certainly more challenging for some teachers but I think we really couldn't have more it more accommodating for parents. And many appreciated our efforts. Some joined us to make it work all year long. Unfortunately, it was the usual reliable and active parents, as opposed to some parents we would like to have seen more often. But I always feel, let's work with who shows up, sometimes its the parents and kids and sometimes its just the kids.

Weldy (1995) points to a caring, involved, supportive parent as one of the most important ingredients in a student's success in school. This is particularly the case when moving from one level of schooling to another. Parents need to know about new policies and organizational procedures, rules and behavior expectations, grading, homework, retention, acceleration and promotion policies. As for the

transition program, parents should be involved by serving on committees, advisory groups and special transition groups for parents. It made a huge difference in the smooth opening for the first year, in particular, for the Freshman Campus (Field notes from Summer Workshop, 1998).

### Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study suggest significant implications for policy and practice for large high schools, in particular. Though fiscal restraints preclude many school systems from establishing separate facilities for ninth graders, it is clear from this study that the ideal setting for ninth graders is one in which special attention is paid to their needs. The following outlines the potential implications for policy and practice:

- 1.) The vulnerability of ninth graders and the high stakes nature of high school as a determinant for future success demand special attention for these students. School administrators must balance the needs of this vulnerable group with those of the other students and identify key staff members to work solely with ninth graders. Throughout this study, participants pointed to the advantage of teachers sharing the same students in a single grade, in this case, ninth grade, to better meet their needs. Sharing classrooms, close classroom proximity to a ninth grade team of teachers and common planning times allowed for ongoing professional development. Teachers shared instructional strategies for working with ninth graders who are at risk. They also shared curriculum materials that helped to engage these students when the logistics of physical distance between the teachers is minimized and time is provided for them to meet. This is a high priority in order for these students to meet with success in their first year of high school.

The developmental tasks of this age group places them in a tenuous position with other high school students and demands that the first year student receive more attention, more support and more options in which they may be engaged. The ten through twelfth grade students has more experience and more resources from outside the home beyond the school, if only by virtue of their age. For students at risk for failure, reaching the age of sixteen and beyond, employment and the opportunity to earn an income can add stability to their lives. High schools would do well to offer financial resources as early as possible to ninth graders as yet another way to keep them engaged in the learning process. Programs which use work-study philosophies are examples of taking care of students' needs financially and educationally.

Teachers want students to take on more academic responsibility as they progress through the high school grades. There is a greater need for staff contact with parents of ninth graders. They need to have all the adults in their lives working in concert. This can be more easily done in a separate facility or wing of a large high school campus with separate staff and administration. It can also be done within a 9-12 high school setting when there is a core group of staff members whose primary role is to work with ninth graders. The teachers of the ninth grade campus felt a direct sense of ownership of the success of the experience. They were invested in the ninth graders and did not have the pull of also meeting the needs of older students. A teaching staff whose time must be divided amongst several grades can not give the same level of investment that ninth graders require. Schools must take this into account when planning for how their ninth graders transition into high school and the support they receive that first year.

A school district's grade configurations matter. The least number of transitions from one school to another, the better able the student is to maximize their learning. The K-8 elementary configuration offers the least number of transitions through those grades. Its challenge is how best to integrate those eighth graders into a 9-12 high school, as the school district in this study is designed. Both the sending elementary schools and the receiving high school must pay careful attention to the transition needs of these entering ninth graders.

Each class of students, during the two years of the ninth grade campus, was a very cohesive group. More knew each other and showed outward affection in ways not usually seen in high school settings. There were very few physical altercations. The most common reason that participants thought this happened was that students felt a sense of safety within the school. The staff presence in the halls contributed to the monitoring of behavior. The sense of community exhibited with students in extra curricular activities provided another opportunity to be with staff and get to know other students in the various arenas, on the stage, on the basketball court and in the club meetings. Together these factors had a positive effect on the students. They witnessed staff collaboration on their behalf and responded accordingly. Policies and practices where the staff have agreed to a certain way of interacting with students which promote teacher connections beyond the school day and in different avenues such as coaching.

2.) Positive relationships between students and teachers and amongst the student body are desirable goals for all schools. The creation of these positive relationships depends greatly on a staff that shares the core values of the school and act on those values in their day to day work. Collaboration between staff was fostered within the ninth grade campus culture. Much of this collaboration developed over the

course of the life of the campus, beginning with the unique opportunity of the planning prior to its opening. The additional workshops during the summer after the first year and at the end of the experience, provided staff with time to reflect, review and evaluate the campus experience. The participants of this study spoke candidly about following through in their community responsibility to “own all the students”. They discussed the creation and implementation of the Common Practices as a way to model to students what it means to be part of a community which ask every member to hold each other responsible for their role in the success of that community. Teachers were coming into the halls between classes because they had agreed that their presence in the hall helped students to feel safe and minimized the inappropriate student interactions. These teachers did not want to let their colleagues down. They had a role in the making of this common practice and they would keep to that commitment. Reaching consensus about a common teacher practice which most typically is seen as an administrative duty, monitoring the halls between classes, is an example of one of the school’s core values determining the culture of the school. This was a powerful revelation but one that may be hard to duplicate in large schools. However, the extension needed to transfer this commitment to the other grades may be a very small one. Once teachers experience the benefits of working more collaboratively they want it to continue. Teaching students from a single grade may be the only feature within a 9-12 school setting that makes that transference more possible.

While not all participants agreed as to what small meant at the ninth grade setting, the sense of connection between staff was articulated by all participants as a clear advantage over the larger main campus of this high school. Though school buildings and physical structures of existing large high schools present a challenge, this overwhelming feeling of connectedness across disciplines suggest that the

isolation so many educators speak about as an element of teaching is a real one. Like many things in life, until you experience something in a different way, you never realize just how deprived you may have been or how different the experience can be. The staff of this ninth grade campus experienced a camaraderie and sense of responsibility to each that made their return to the main campus more poignant. They appreciated the closeness and lamented the absence of it after they returned. Large schools would do well to pair teachers together in co-teaching, team teaching and/or peer coaching models, and cluster grade level teachers as closely together in physical proximity as is possible. This clustering of teachers who teach the same grade level, though not as common as teaching a range of grades in a particular department, may allow for some of the same benefits as those teaching only ninth graders. The same sense of connection for those teaching juniors and the seniors, with the onslaught of college recommendations, may seem equally compelling for grade level grouping as the ninth. However, I submit that the very nature of this first year student to the changes of high school, begs that they be treated differently. Will resources permit more students beyond ninth grade to receive special attention, small class sizes, and a team approach to teaching? Most probably not in large high schools, but these are goals worth working toward.

3.) Large high schools need to think of ways to pare down their size into more easily managed groups. Though this is not a new idea, this study reinforces how critical it is for students to connect with the adults at school. Size clearly determines how difficult or easy it is to make this connection. Using a team approach, administrators have the ability to design structures which allow for more opportunities for teachers and students to connect. Large high schools have created schools within schools, house systems, and theme academies to make them seem more intimate. Proximity to other teachers, support staff and administration matters. This study repeatedly



referred to this proximity as making a big difference in the effectiveness of the team approach. The structural design is more effective when this proximity is taken into account. It improves the ease with which support is available.

The implications from this study demand that these smaller school groupings take into account the special needs of ninth graders. It would be important to have separate ninth grade programs that then feed students into whichever system is in place for their remaining high school years. Without specific focus on the ninth grade year, there is a danger that these small learning communities or theme academies will be populated with second year freshman who have not earned enough credits to be considered a sophomore. An imbalance is then created for the individual students impacted by this, as well as their classmates and the school. Designing structures to break down large high schools is not sufficient if ninth graders are not given special attention. This researcher believes that the number of returning tenth graders would be fewer without direct interventions for most, if not all, ninth graders. This seems especially the case for students at risk for failure.

The school structure must take their needs into account. To address this issue, schools must provide teachers with opportunities to play active roles in the decision making process, particularly as it pertains to professional practices which bring educational jargon to life. Collegiality behavior is an important feature. Teachers and other educators need to take part in planning, proposing and evaluating whatever program is developed. There must be a buy-in from the staff. They must identify the ways in which they see the school's core values translated into everyday actions. School administrators must embrace more inclusive leadership training that allow the empowerment of others. This constitutes a fundamental feature of Danville's Freshman Campus and holds promise for administrators whose philosophy matches

this belief.

### Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, case study research findings are essentially limited to the current study which makes generalizing the findings more difficult. The findings at the Danville Freshman Campus are consistent with the research on transition programs for entering ninth grade students. The results, however, are limited to the conditions at Danville's Freshman Campus. Additional research is necessary before the results can be generalized to other school districts. It is the hope of this researcher that the specific details provided in this study will facilitate a degree of transferability to the district's present planning for the ninth grade transition to the high school and for subsequent research.

A second limitation is the relationship of the researcher to the study. The researcher worked as principal of the Danville Freshman Campus during its two-year existence and helped select staff, as well as plan for the opening as principal six months before the school year started. Out of the ten participants in this study, two were evaluated by the researcher, in her role as principal, during the duration of the campus. In addition, the researcher served as guidance counselor at Danville High for twelve years prior to taking the position as principal of the Freshman Campus. Though this guidance position did not include evaluation of teachers or other staff, a relationship did exist between the principal and most of the staff while she served as guidance counselor. Extreme care was taken to minimize the variables that would compromise the validity of the study. Guidelines and procedures outlined by Anderson (1994) caution researchers in the hazards of studying one's own school. Yet, interpretations in the analysis of the findings are subject to the natural bias that the researcher brings because of her firsthand experience with the study setting and participants.

The researcher was careful to triangulate data, using the interviews, observations and recall about the school, and careful examination of field notes which included agendas and minutes of planning meetings, before during and after the campus, summer workshops to assess and review the experience between year one and two, faculty meetings, parent meetings and professional development opportunities, all in an attempt to interpret and analyze the work from different perspectives.

A third limitation is the absence of hard data from students' records. The researcher did not examine grades, attendance records or disciplinary reports of the ninth graders who attended the Freshman Campus. Most of the information from students came from observations, and their input on a survey of activities and volunteer opportunities. It would have been helpful to have more direct input from students about their experience at the Freshman Campus, especially in terms of their academic and social evaluation. However, this study sought to document the perspectives of teachers and did not directly include the student point of view. Their input may have given more validity to the findings of the study.

The fourth limitation is the time lapse between the end of the Freshman Campus and the time the majority of the participants were interviewed. The researcher did not begin interviews for this study until the campus closed. One interview was conducted as a pilot study the summer after the campus closed to be sure questions were appropriate to answer the research questions. The remaining nine interviews were conducted over the last five years, two were done a year after the campus closed and the final six were completed during the fifth year after the campus had closed. The memory factor may have played a role in some of the participants' responses, however, once the interview began most recalled specific stories and events, which supported their answers. There has been some discussion since the close of the Freshman Campus that it has a reputation of having become a "legendary experience".

Today, some five years after the closing, most conversations about the Freshman Campus between those who were a part of it and those who were not, is that it was a wonderful opportunity for students and staff to build community and grow personally and professionally. The problems seem to have faded into the background and the mostly good memories remained.

### Implications for Future Study

School districts planning for the transition to high school face huge challenges. Ninth graders are the most vulnerable group of students because of the multiple factors of their stage of development, their peer influence and the high stakes of high school success today. Unless collaborative efforts between the sending and receiving schools are institutionalized, ninth graders will have more difficulty meeting the demands and challenges of high school. Particularly challenging for educators is the recognized need to make large high schools more responsive to the special needs of its most vulnerable group of students, ninth graders.

This study revealed that ninth graders require connections with others to help with the myriad of adolescent tasks they must accomplish. Positive relationships with peers, and adults in and out of school, are important indicators for ninth graders' success. Additional research on the key elements for building these positive relationships would add to the studies which aim to determine the best way to meet the needs of this group.

High school size plays a pivotal role in the ability of adults to meet ninth graders' needs. The complexity of the developmental tasks of adolescence require on going support to ninth graders, in particular. Future studies would be helpful in identifying specific strategies that address the challenges that face today's young teenagers just entering high school. Research points to the vulnerability of ninth

graders and the high stakes nature of the high school experience.

The larger the size of the high school the greater the challenges for students and school staff. Issues of safety are lessened in smaller school settings. More study about the benefits of smaller school size or separate settings for ninth graders would inform school staff as they seek to keep all students safe at school.

A proliferation of ninth grade academies across the country has been in response to the recognized need to treat ninth graders differently. A complete meta-analysis of these academies would add to the literature about these programs and further document the importance of the transition to high school. It would also help address the issue of whether a separate academy hinders the maturation level of ninth graders. A debate with a couple of teachers in this study was noticeable as they differed as to whether the ninth grades acted more immature because of the absence of older student role models. Further study could address the notion that the presence of older students promotes more mature behavior in ninth graders.

This study revealed that Danville public schools had an advantage with its existing K-8 elementary school structure. A study specifically on K-8 schools and the transition to high school would also add to the literature that purports that minimal transitions in school make for better academic performance. The existing Danville High School programs for eighth to ninth grade transition were enhanced because of the lessons learned from the Freshman Campus. The additional items which enhanced the transition programs were a direct result of the researcher's desire to have Freshman Campus staff look forward to their return to the main campus.

Low performing ninth graders would certainly benefit from more support from teachers and peers. The positive effects of strong working relationships between students and teachers is most noticeable with students at risk for failing or underachieving. Positive relationships with older high school students also serve

as indicators for success. Studies which focus on the benefits of ninth graders and older students working together on sports teams, plays, school clubs and other extra curricular activities would possibly best serve the low performing students who feel unsure of their academic skills. With increased support and better attendance, students do have a better chance at success in high school. Additional research would help more schools understand the importance of extra curricular activities, particularly with tough fiscal constraints and some after school program are the first to be sacrificed. More documented evidence would lend support to the school administrators charged with making those hard choices. With limited resources and more public pressures on school principals due to high stakes testing, research which supports specialized programming for ninth graders would be welcomed.

Funding to establish separate facilities for ninth graders is not realistic for many school districts. But isolating ninth graders in a separate floor, wing or building does offer additional parameters for increasing the odds of their success. It would be interesting to compare ninth grade programs which operate in a separate building, wing or floor with those in traditional high school settings. Clearly, the teachers who experienced Danville's Freshman Campus felt strongly that the students had an easier transition to the high school. It is hard to know whether their experience could be duplicated in other districts. Yet, their lessons could be shared with similar school districts.

To generalize the findings beyond this study, more input from students and parents would be important to more fully reflect the effectiveness of high school transition programs. Just as teachers' voices are limited in the literature on this topic, students' and parents' voices are also missing from the research on the transition to high school. A study which combines the voices of all the stake holders would not only more fully identify the issues of the transition to high school, but also empower

students and parents to become more aware of how best to help themselves and each other.

### Conclusions

The transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is a critical time in a young person's educational career. Ninth grade programs and separate buildings for ninth graders have grown over the last ten years in an effort to meet their distinct needs. Most of these programs have been created by school administrators and others outside the school. Research in this area reveals very little documentation of the teachers' voices on this subject. This researcher seeks to add their perspective in identifying the salient features of effective ninth grade programs which make for a smooth transition to high school. More specifically, the researcher wanted to learn if teachers of only ninth graders believed that a separate facility for ninth graders eased the transition to high school.

An observational case study using qualitative methodology was used in this study. Ten faculty members were interviewed about their work at a ninth grade campus that existed for two years while the main high school was being renovated. The researcher was interested in determining the benefits of a separate facility for ninth graders from the teachers' point of view. In addition, the essential features of successful ninth grade programs were identified from a sample of these programs from across the United States.

The results of this study are in two parts. First a report on the results of teacher interviews about the benefits of a separate facility for ninth graders, and secondly, a review of the salient elements of effective ninth grade programs.

Part I. Participants interviewed believed the following:

- isolating ninth graders in a separate building, wing or floor eases the

transition to high school

- breaking large high schools into smaller units or schools within a school enhances the likelihood of building productive teacher/student relationships
- ninth grade students benefit by first building relationships with peers in the same grade, with limited access to older students
- less worries of bullying by older students with freshman only facilities
- parent involvement increases with a separate program for ninth graders
- student activities play an instrumental role in ninth graders feeling connected to their school and helps link them with older students in a positive way

Part II. A review of a sample of ninth grade programs revealed the following salient features:

- programs must include all stake holders: students, staff at sending and receiving schools, parents
- preparation for students must begin during the eighth grade year
- identification of at risk students must be made in early spring and connections with high school staff should begin at that time
- assign small groups of students to teachers who will be their advisors
- arrange for older students to be mentors for ninth graders helps to ease the transition
- have all ninth graders involved in some type of extra curricular activity
- provide summer courses at the high school prior to the ninth grade to build skills and familiarity with the facility

These findings were consistent with the literature on the transition to high school. The ninth grade teachers' perspectives validated their experience and the research. Administrators should pay close attention to the planning for this transition in order to maximize the success of high school for ninth grade students.



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### *Features of Sample 9th Grade Programs*

School	State	Size	Targets: Students/Parents & Staff	Separate Building, Wing/Floor	Elementary & Middle Grades	Urban= U Suburban = S
1. Cambridge Rindge & Latin High School	MA	1,913	yes	no	K-8	U
2. Cape Henlopen High School	DE	1,161	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
3. Danville Freshman Campus*	MA	450 (1,500)	yes	yes	K-8	S
4. East Hartford High School	CN	2,293	yes	no	K-5 6-8	U
5. Forsyth Central High School	GA	1,539	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
6. Huron High School	MI	1,863	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
7. Kettering High School	MI	1,981	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	U
8. Milford High School	MA	1,120	yes	no	K-5 6-8	S
9. Montclair High School	NJ	1,800	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
10. Oceans Springs High School	MS	1,609	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
11. Patterson High School	MD	1,905	yes	no	K-5 6-8	U
12. Patuxent High School	MD	1,848	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
13. Pueblo County High School	CO	825	yes	no	K-5 6-8	S
14. Rush-Henrietta 9th Grade Academy	NY	463 (1421)	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
15. San Benito Veteran's Memorial High School	TX	671 (1611)	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
16. Savannah 9th Grade Academy	CA	270 (875)	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	U
17. Wheaton High School	MD	1,445	yes	yes	K-5 6-8	S
18. Worthington Kilborne High School	OH	1,678	yes	no	K-5 6-8	S

Random sample of 9th grade programs from internet search, Nov. 2003. Numbers in parentheses represent enrollment numbers for grades 10-12. When known, 9<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment numbers are indicated above the parenthesis.

•Danville Freshman Campus, the study setting, is a fictitious name used for this dissertation.

**Teachers' Reactions to a Ninth Grade Campus: Implications for the Transition to High School**

**Interview Questions**

**PART I. BACKGROUND**

**1. Current Position**

\_\_\_ Teacher of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Support Staff:    \_\_\_ Guidance  
                              \_\_\_ SPED  
                              \_\_\_ Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator \_\_\_\_\_ (specify)

**2. Number of years in this position \_\_\_\_\_?**

**3. What was your prior experience before the Freshman Campus?**

\_\_\_ BHS teacher of \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ years Before that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4. How did you become part of the Freshman Campus?**

\_\_\_ elected                      \_\_\_ assigned                      \_\_\_ only teach 9th grade  
\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Education:**

**Highest degree:**

\_\_\_ M.Ed.                      \_\_\_ C.A.S.                      \_\_\_ M.A.                      \_\_\_ B.S./B.A.  
\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

**Undergraduate School:**

\_\_\_ liberal arts                      \_\_\_ school of education                      \_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

**High School:**

\_\_\_ Independent                      \_\_\_ Religious                      \_\_\_ Public

**Size of your class:**

\_\_\_ under 100                      \_\_\_ under 500                      \_\_\_ 500-750  
\_\_\_ over 1,000

**Setting:**

\_\_\_ city                      \_\_\_ suburb                      \_\_\_ rural

**6. What grade transitions did you go through as you progressed in school from elementary to high school?**

\_\_\_ k-8 to H.S.                      \_\_\_ k-6 to junior high (7 & 8) to H.S.                      \_\_\_ k-6 to

junior high (7-9) to H.S.    \_\_\_ other combination\_\_\_\_\_

7. What do you remember about the preparation for the transition to high school? Can you name activities or people who helped with this transition?

\_\_\_meetings with guidance counselor/advisor    \_\_\_meeting in HR groups

\_\_\_parent involvement    \_\_\_other\_\_\_\_\_

8. How do you remember this transition?

\_\_\_I don't    \_\_\_smooth/easy    \_\_\_problematic (please explain)

\_\_\_scary/intimidating    \_\_\_okay (not good/not bad)

\_\_\_other\_\_\_\_\_

9. Who or what was particularly helpful?

\_\_\_planned activities/orientation    \_\_\_siblings    \_\_\_friends

\_\_\_teachers    \_\_\_counselors/advisors    \_\_\_principal

\_\_\_parents or other adult family members    \_\_\_other\_\_\_\_\_

## PART II. FRESHMAN CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

For questions 1-6 please rate each item on a scale of 1-4, with 1 being the least beneficial and 4 the most beneficial. Give examples to illustrate your answer wherever possible.

1. What do you believe are the benefits of having a Freshman Campus?

\_\_\_class cohesiveness    \_\_\_closer staff/student relations

\_\_\_all in same grade    \_\_\_easier access to administration

\_\_\_admin. worked as a team    \_\_\_smaller setting/numbers of students

\_\_\_easier for students to connect with adults    \_\_\_easier to communicate

with other staff    \_\_\_better preparation for the remaining high school years

\_\_\_separated from older students    \_\_\_more academic focus

\_\_\_more freshman activities    \_\_\_more structured experience

\_\_\_easier to build student confidence    \_\_\_better parent communication

\_\_\_less overwhelming transition from 8th grade    \_\_\_smallness reduces

student anonymity    \_\_\_students stay younger longer\_\_\_

other\_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you believe are the limitations of having a Freshman Campus?

\_\_\_missed the positive influence of older students    \_\_\_all same grade

\_\_\_missed opportunities only offered at Main Campus (MC)    \_\_\_miss larger

## Appendix A.

department/colleagues \_\_\_\_\_miss additional passive admin. support  
 \_\_\_\_adds another transition to 10th grade \_\_\_\_ building/facilities  
 \_\_\_\_isolation from MC activities (staff & students) \_\_\_\_too similar to elem.sch  
 \_\_\_\_location (too far away from MC\_\_\_\_/busy street-dangerous)  
 \_\_\_\_MC resources not equitably distributed  
 \_\_\_\_sharing classrooms \_\_\_\_\_students stay younger longer  
 \_\_\_\_other\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. In what way has the Freshman Campus helped the transition to the high school?

\_\_\_\_more protected setting \_\_\_\_\_easier adult connections w/students  
 \_\_\_\_\_smallness reduces student anonymity \_\_\_\_\_students stay younger  
 longer \_\_\_\_\_students understand demands of high school quicker (less  
 distractions from older students  
 \_\_\_\_easier to make friends with classmates \_\_\_\_\_parents more involved  
 \_\_\_\_freshman only activities \_\_\_\_HR/teacher advisor more connected  
 \_\_\_\_truly closed campus 1st semester \_\_\_\_\_other\_\_\_\_\_

### 4. What activities do you feel have been most helpful?

\_\_\_\_mandatory X block \_\_\_\_\_freshman performing arts courses/opportunities  
 \_\_\_\_freshman social events \_\_\_\_freshman sports \_\_\_\_Tuesday  
 Tutorials \_\_\_\_\_Academic Support Center \_\_\_\_\_other\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. How has this experience supported your professional growth?

\_\_\_\_interdisciplinary discussions with colleagues \_\_\_\_sharing strategies with  
 others who teach the same students \_\_\_\_\_more knowledge about the needs of  
 ninth graders \_\_\_\_fewer preps allow more time for other needs  
 \_\_\_\_better understanding of the needs of parents of ninth graders  
 \_\_\_\_informal professional development opportunities in staff room  
 \_\_\_\_more experience working as a team across disciplines/team problem-  
 solving  
 \_\_\_\_easier to develop curriculum strategies with input from those teaching the

same course      \_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

6. How might you predict the kinds of teachers who would be most supportive and effective with ninth grade students?

\_\_\_ have a willingness to learn new strategies      \_\_\_ new to profession

\_\_\_ firm but fair attitude      \_\_\_ energetic \_\_\_ extreme patience

\_\_\_ student focus      \_\_\_ curriculum focus \_\_\_ clear boundaries

\_\_\_ reaches out      \_\_\_ team player/approach to problem-solving

\_\_\_ awareness of the students' developmental issues      \_\_\_ regular

communication with home      \_\_\_ offers extra curricular opportunities

\_\_\_ multi-modal instruction delivery      \_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

Please add any comments or share any experiences which you believe further illustrates or clarifies what you think is critical to the transition to high school.

**Informed Consent Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You are invited to participate in my research study as part of the fulfillment of my required dissertation for the Ph.d. in Education Administration at Boston College. The title of the study is "Teachers' Reactions to a Ninth Grade Campus: Implications for the Transition to High School." The purpose of the study is to add to the knowledge base about the transition to high school from the staff's perspective.

I plan to conduct interviews with a range of staff from various departments within Brookline High School. Your participation would help to insure that all departments are represented. However, your participation is completely voluntary. Your name was randomly selected from those staff who met the eligibility requirement. Each interview will be no longer than one hour in length, to be conducted at a time and place convenient for you. It is my hope that the information you share will not only have implications for the transition to high school, in general but more specifically, impact the transition planning for this school community.

All interviews will be strictly confidential. Each interview will be coded with an assigned number and, as principle investigator, I will be the only one to know which number belongs to each person interviewed. You are free to ask any questions before, during or after the interview. Should at some point you wish to withdraw from the study, you need only to inform me that you wish not to participate. If the interview has been conducted, the written transcript will be given to you and would not be part of the research. All participants will be given a summary of the findings and conclusions of the study once the dissertation is complete.

Please sign below if you accept this invitation. Thank you for taking the time to read this and for considering to participate in this research.

Sincerely,

Pipier Smith-Mumford

---

I accept your invitation to be interviewed for this study. I understand my participation is completely voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

March 31, 1999

To: Dean Dennis Shirley, Boston College, Human Subjects Research Review Committee

Re: Dissertation Research by **Pipier Smith-Mumford**

Dear HSR Committee:

The Brookline Public Schools approve of and support the dissertation research which Pipier Smith-Mumford is designing. Her dissertation, "Staff Reactions to a Ninth Grade Campus: Implications for the Transition to High School", will help continue our school system's efforts to understand and implement the most effective strategies for ensuring a smooth transition from our K-8 elementary schools to our high school.

Ms. Smith-Mumford's study will focus on those high school staff members who have been a part of the two year Freshman Campus program. We are aware that Ms. Smith-Mumford is planning to interview this particular group of staff, collect data about their experience and analyze their perspectives as it pertains to the transition to high school.

We look forward to working with Ms. Smith-Mumford in the Brookline Schools.

Sincerely,

James F. Walsh

cc: Ms. Smith-Mumford

**Study Participants' Background Grid**

PARTICIPANT	SUBJECT AREA	GENDER	YEARS TEACHING
1	English	Female	27
2	Social Studies	Male	8
3	Physical Education	Female	24
4*	English	Male	27
5*	Math	Male	11
6	Special Education	Female	24
7	Foreign language	Female	31
8	Science	Male	35
9*	Guidance	Female	34
10*	Administration	Male	32

\*Whole career at Danville High



### Freshman Campus - Student Interest Survey

In order for us to plan for next year, we are asking all eighth graders to complete the following activity interest list. Please place a check mark (✓) next to any activity in which you may be interested in participating next year. Please check as many as you like and return this form to your counselor. We plan to support a wide range of activities at the Freshman Campus. Your input will help us to set priorities, allocate resources, and provide activities of interest to you.

#### Activities (After school and/or X block)

- ☐ Conversation Across Differences
- ☐ Freshman Campus Art Show
- ☐ Freshman Campus Entrepreneurs
- ☐ Freshman Campus Musical
- ☐ Freshman Campus Newspaper/Magazine
- ☐ Freshman Campus Play
- ☐ Freshman Campus Science Fair/Inventors Contest
- ☐ Freshman Steering Committee
- ☐ Freshman Campus Student Government/Town Meeting
- ☐ Peer Counseling
- ☐ Peer Tutoring
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### Intramural Sports (Freshman Campus teams, 1 or 2 games/week, after school)

- Girls:    ☐ Basketball    ☐ Volleyball    ☐ Soccer    ☐ Softball  
 Boys:    ☐ Basketball    ☐ Volleyball    ☐ Soccer    ☐ Softball  
 Coed:    ☐ Basketball    ☐ Volleyball    ☐ Soccer    ☐ Softball  
 Other:    \_\_\_\_\_

#### Clubs (After School and/or X block)

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Club                | <input type="checkbox"/> Badminton Club        | <input type="checkbox"/> Black Awareness Club            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brotherhood               | <input type="checkbox"/> Chess Club            | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Service Club          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Club             | <input type="checkbox"/> Concert Choir         | <input type="checkbox"/> Dance Society                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drama Society             | <input type="checkbox"/> Gay/Straight Alliance | <input type="checkbox"/> Ichthus (Bible Study group)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jazz Choir                | <input type="checkbox"/> Juggling Club         | <input type="checkbox"/> Latin Club                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mad Poets Society         | <input type="checkbox"/> Math Team             | <input type="checkbox"/> Media Club                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation Club            | <input type="checkbox"/> New Comers Club       | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Adventure Club          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy Club           | <input type="checkbox"/> School Newspaper      | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish Club                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Games Club      |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Alliance Against Racism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Peer Organization |  |  |
| Other _____  |  |  |

**Freshman Campus - Student Interest Survey (cont.)**

(After School)

**Girls Sports**

- |                 |                  |                 |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| -- Cheerleading | -- Cross Country | -- Field Hockey |
| -- Soccer       | -- Volleyball    | -- Basketball   |
| -- Gymnastics   | -- Ice Hockey    | -- Skiing       |
| -- Track        | -- Wrestling     | -- Crew         |
| -- Golf         | -- Lacrosse      | -- Sailing      |
| -- Softball     | -- Tennis        | -- Swimming     |

**Boys Sports**

- |                  |               |               |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| -- Cross Country | -- Football   | -- Golf       |
| -- Soccer        | -- Volleyball | -- Basketball |
| -- Ice Hockey    | -- Skiing     | -- Swimming   |
| -- Track         | -- Wrestling  | -- Crew       |
| -- Baseball      | -- Lacrosse   | -- Rugby      |
| -- Sailing       | -- Tennis     |               |

### Freshman Campus - Student Volunteer Survey

The staff and administration of the Freshman Campus are busy planning and working on the development of the Freshman Campus program for next year. We would like to develop a list of students who may be available to volunteer to work with us in a number of capacities. If you are interested in being a Student Volunteer, please complete this form and return it to your guidance counselor.

We do not know how many student volunteers we will need, but a staff member from the Freshman Campus Program will contact you.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in:

- \_\_\_ working with staff in planning opening day activities.
- \_\_\_ serving on a committee working with the Principal to represent student opinions.
- \_\_\_ decorating/painting the school.
- \_\_\_ offering my computer skills.
- \_\_\_ serving on the student orientation committee.
- \_\_\_ serving as a building guide.
- \_\_\_ serving as a teacher's aide (helping before school starts).
- \_\_\_ serving as an office aide or science lab assistant (circle one or both).
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Are you available the last two weeks of August? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

**Ninth Grade Transition Programs in Place at Danville High School Prior to the Freshman Campus**

Meetings with guidance counselor and 8th graders in February to give overview of transition process

Meetings with high school staff and 8th grade parents at the K-8 elementary school in March to discuss courses and life at the high school

Meetings to select courses with 8th grade teachers, guidance counselor and parents in March

Meetings with high school students and 8th graders at K-8 schools to learn of courses and hear department presentations in March and April

Meetings with high school students in 8th grade in 8th grade Health classes to discuss social life and extra curricular activities at the high school from April until June

Open House for parents and students at the high school in March to see facility and learn first hand of courses and specialty programs

Curriculum night at the high school for 8th grade parents in March to learn of academic offering presented by curriculum coordinators

Summer course offered to entering ninth graders at the high school for students recommended by guidance counselor to improve skills and minimize anxiety about the high school

Junior Mentors contact their five or six entering ninth graders over the summer to welcome them, answer questions and arrange to meet them on Orientation Day; Junior Mentors contact their ninth grader once a week in homeroom through January

Orientation Day for ninth graders only, students start one day prior to the rest of the students returning; they meet their junior mentors, homeroom teachers, review their schedules, attend classes, meet their teachers and have an opening day BBQ sponsored by sophomore parents of the PTO.

Ninth graders have six week guidance groups in the fall with their guidance counselor to follow up on orientation and transition issues

Ninth graders earn open campus second semester with a C average and approval from their administrator and parents. Until then they have study halls and these continue if the above criteria is not met.

## Common Practices

Dear Colleagues,

The Common Practices Group met on the second day of our two day workshop in June. Based on the discussions during that meeting, the following will constitute our common practices:

### 1. TARDY POLICY:

A.) Each teacher will decide his or her own practice here and apply it consistently. Please give a copy of your tardy policy to administration within the first full week of school so that we can support you as needed. **WE WILL NOT USE OFFICE PASSES. THE STUDENT WILL COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH THE TEACHER. PLEASE DO NOT SEND STUDENTS TO THE OFFICE FOR A PASS.**

B.) Technology department will create a FORM that we can all use. If for legitimate reasons you hold a student at the end of your class, you will be able to complete a simple form (mostly just a check off list) indicating why (taking a test, needed to speak to student immediately, etc.) which the student will bring to his/her next class. This will help us as staff be clear with each other in the most efficient way. This is considered an excused tardy which will exempt the student from a penalty. When students arrive without a pass/note it is to be considered unexcused and you determine the consequence according to your established policy.

C.) Administrators will maintain a Discipline Book. This will include a page for every student. It will not give full details of incidents but short summaries of disciplinary issues, i.e., chronic tardiness, fighting, disrespectful behavior such as foul language or rudeness, etc. This book will be accessible to staff for review.

### 2. ABSENCE POLICY:

A.) THE STUDENT HANDBOOK policy (pp. 19-20) will apply as the bottom line COMMON PRACTICE.

B.) Teachers may complement the above with their own practice in terms of how absence affects grades etc. Again, please submit this to me and Jim so we know what your practice is and can support you.

### 3. FOOD, WALKMANS, BEEPERS...

A.) Generally we will follow the handbook here. As with last year, no food after 8am beyond the cafeteria. No vending machine access between 8am and lunch. Gum has become a problem on the floors around the building, I would like us to please discourage gum chewing.

B.) If you see a student with a walkman outside of the cafeteria area from 7:25 to 2:20, **TAKE THE HEADPHONES** and turn them into the main office. Students may get them at the end of the day if this is their first offense. They may have them during lunch only.

C.) If you see a student with a pager/beeper, please ask for it and turn it into the main office. It will be returned to a parent or guardian only.

There are other policies in the handbook that you should be familiar with but these seem to be the top three violations. **PLEASE REVIEW ALL THE POLICIES SO THAT WE DO APPLY THEM CONSISTENTLY.**

### 4. Additional Items:

A.) All teachers will **post their schedules** in their rooms including times they may be available to students. All community information, i.e. School calendar, weekly schedule, bus shuttle schedule will also be posted in every classroom.

B.) All teachers will submit homework assignments to the Academic Support Center (ASC) where every class will have a file folder of assignments. All sheets should be sent to the ASC by the end of the day unless teachers submit weekly sheets and update these as needed.

C.) Teachers will make referrals to the ASC for those students who need additional support to complete their assignments. The ASC will be open everyday after school except on Tuesdays. Teachers and students may meet in the ASC during X blocks when scheduling allows and students may make up tests in the center. Teachers should contact ASC teachers to make these

arrangements.

D.) During the passing time between classes, **teachers will monitor the halls** outside of their classrooms. This means teachers will stand outside their classroom door after classes are dismissed. The goal is to minimize excessive noise, horseplay and other inappropriate behaviors with our presence serving as passive supervision.

**IN CONCLUSION, the key here, is that we set clear and firm expectations of these ninth graders in a way that also respects them and encourages them to be HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS. We want them to take responsibility for their own behavior. We want to give them a chance to "do the right thing." HOWEVER, as they demonstrate that they have not yet internalized a proper sense of individual and community responsibility, then WE MUST BE CLEAR, CONSISTENT, AND FIRM in our response to externally hold them to a proper sense of individual and community responsibility. THE FIRST WEEKS OF SCHOOL WILL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT!**

Thank you all for your thoughtful input both in the group and in our staff meetings. May we all have a great final year for Freshman Campus.

## GUIDELINES FOR FRESHMAN PRIVILEGES

Congratulations! Your grades, attendance and good citizenship at Freshman Campus have earned you Freshman Privileges. Please review the guidelines below so that you understand our expectations of you:

### REMINDERS:

- 1. Freshman Privileges are only for those study halls from which you have been excused.** Check your attached schedule to be sure the correct study halls have been removed. You are expected to be at any study hall that is still listed on the attached schedule.
- 2. If you're excused from a morning study hall** and arrive to school before nine o'clock, you must remain in the cafeteria. You MAY NOT be in the halls while classes are in session. This includes trips to your locker (plan ahead!).
- 3. If you're excused from a lunch block study hall**, you may decide where you want to have lunch. If you decide to remain in the building, you must remain in the cafeteria. You MAY NOT be in the halls while classes are in session. This includes trips to your locker (plan ahead!).
- 4. If you're excused from a last period study hall**, you may leave the campus. If you decide to remain in the building, you must remain in the cafeteria. You MAY NOT be in the halls while classes are in session. This includes trips to your locker (plan ahead!).
- 5. If you need a quiet place in which to work**, you may study in a corner of the cafeteria.
- 6. All students who have been excused from a study hall** have the option of meeting with an available teacher or counselor (if they have made prior arrangements to do so), or going to the Main Campus library.
- 7. You can not disturb classes that are in session.**
- 8. Any student who violates these conditions or other school rules, may have Freshman Privileges revoked by the Administration.**

### Freshman Campus - Student Volunteer Survey

The staff and administration of the Freshman Campus are busy planning and working on the development of the Freshman Campus program for next year. We would like to develop a list of students who may be available to volunteer to work with us in a number of capacities. If you are interested in being a Student Volunteer, please complete this form and return it to your guidance counselor.

We do not know how many student volunteers we will need, but a staff member from the Freshman Campus Program will contact you.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in:

- \_\_\_ working with staff in planning opening day activities.
- \_\_\_ serving on a committee working with the Principal to represent student opinions.
- \_\_\_ decorating/painting the school.
- \_\_\_ offering my computer skills.
- \_\_\_ serving on the student orientation committee.
- \_\_\_ serving as a building guide.
- \_\_\_ serving as a teacher's aide (helping before school starts).
- \_\_\_ serving as an office aide or science lab assistant (circle one or both).
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Are you available the last two weeks of August? \_\_yes \_\_no



### **Freshman Day at Main Campus**

**8:10-9:10:** All students report to homeroom. Students complete a survey of the year. Homeroom teachers will be asked to review the whole day's schedule with them, and in particular, the background information on the Facing History and Ourselves presentation they'll see at the Main Campus. Attendance taken and reminders to students that attendance will be taken periodically during the day (FYI: upon arrival to the auditorium for the first presentation, after lunch when we begin the field exercises, and back in the auditorium for the closing activities). Students are formed that if they are not present for any portion of the day's activities, they will be considered truant for the day. Lastly, students will have a complimentary lunch.

**9:10:** walk to the Main Campus, as a homeroom group. Choose your favorite route.

**9:30:** begin seating in the Auditorium

**9:45-10:45:** Facing History and Ourselves program in the auditorium. **At the conclusion of the program** dismissal to the field for pizza/soda/ice cream lunch which will be provided free of charge.

**11:20:** Students reconvene by homeroom along the field. Junior Mentors will meet the homerooms and will divide the students in the homeroom into two or three groups.

**11:30:** Team-building activity (modified Scavenger Hunt) begins, led by Junior Mentors.

**12:00:** 3 homerooms come together to share results of their Scavenger Hunt, with guidance from Homeroom Teachers and Junior Mentors.

**12:30:** return to auditorium for final activities.

**12:45-2:00:** speech by guest speaker, Mark Mainella, Freshman Campus banner presentation to a Junior Mentor, and distribution of commemorative tee shirts.

(F.C. shuttle will be available for staff to return to Freshman Campus.)

## **Post Freshman Campus Planning**

### **Staff Survey**

Thank you for completing this survey. Your input is extremely valuable. Please complete the questions below and feel free to add any comments or suggestions on the reverse side.

1. What are the characteristics of the Freshman Campus which make it special and effective for students and staff?

2. How might those characteristics be recreated at the Main Campus?

3. Would you chose to teach freshman again next year? If yes, to what extent and under what conditions would you prefer, i.e, exclusively freshman, half freshman and half upperclassman; a cluster of teachers across disciplines sharing a common work space, a team of teachers with administrators and support staff, etc. ?

4. Would you be interested in participating in an on going discussion about how best to bring the lessons from Freshman Campus to the Main Campus?

Yes, name: \_\_\_\_\_

Not at this time, name \_\_\_\_\_

VITA  
Pipier L. Smith-Mumford

1974-1978	Smith College, Northampton, MA B.A., psychology, May, 1978
1977	Howard University, Washington, DC Exchange Student
1978-1979	Harvard University, Graduate School of Education Ed.M., counseling/consulting, June, 1979
1979-1983	METCO Counselor Wayland High School Wayland, MA Massachusetts Certification Guidance, K-12
1983-1985	Clinical Coordinator Project Concern, Inc. Boston, MA
1985-1997	Guidance Counselor Brookline High School Brookline, MA
1989-1994	Pine Manor College Minority Student Advisor Chestnut Hill, MA
1994-2004	Doctoral Student/Candidate, Educational Administration Boston College, Lynch School of Education
1997-1999	Principal Brookline High School-Freshman Campus Brookline, MA Massachusetts Certification Principalship, K-12
1999- Present	Principal Pierce Elementary School (K-8) Brookline, MA
2000-Present	Guest Speaker/Panelist: Principalship Boston College, Simmons College, Lesley University